

*Gautier*  
*and the Romantics*

JOHN GARBER PALACHE



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*Gautier and the Romantics*

*By the Same Author:*

FOUR NOVELISTS  
OF THE OLD RÉGIME

*Crébillon fils, Diderot, Laclos,  
Restif de la Bretonne*









*Photograph by Nadar*

*theophile gautier*

# GAUTIER

## AND THE ROMANTICS

*By*

JOHN GARBER PALACHE



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THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

*Photograph by Nadar*

*Frontispiece*

GAUTIER

*From a cartoon in "Le Charivari"*

*Facing page 38*

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

*Photograph by Nadar*

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EDMOND AND JULES DE GONCOURT

*From a sketch by Gavarni*

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SAINTE-BEUVE, MÉRIMÉE, FLAUBERT, BALZAC

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*Facing page 166*



*Gautier and the Romantics*





## CHAPTER I

### *Introductory*

THERE are random recollections, critical and biographical essays, but there is no full and detailed account of the life of Théophile Gautier in its two-fold significance—his devotion to the theory of art for art's sake, and the part he played in the literary life of the period between the two French Empires. His participation in the triumph of Romanticism under the leadership of Victor Hugo, his friendships and literary discussions with Balzac, Baudelaire, Flaubert and others, are of permanent interest in the history of French literature. Gautier saw the rise and fall of Romanticism, its development into the Naturalistic School, but he cannot definitely be classed as either a Romanticist or a Naturalist. His theory of art was in almost exact accord with that of Leconte de Lisle, whom he influenced and of whose group—the Parnassians—he was the forerunner. Gautier had not Leconte de Lisle's solidity, solemnity and depth, but he had his sense of exquisite workmanship, of impeccable style and form.

Gautier's writings have the colour of Romanticism, an occasional wit, and a humour which is rare in French literature. Like Flaubert and Leconte de Lisle, his interests were exclusively artistic; he cared little for and underestimated the importance of political and sociological questions. His poetry is not the sentimental and sometimes hysterical sensitiveness of Musset; his significance is not

that of a vast structure of human experience in Balzacian representation, nor that of the strange dark passion of Baudelaire. His principal domain is not that of profound thought nor of intense emotion. His province is the exquisite beauty of a finished miniature, the proportion and symmetry of a tiny statue. His appeal is chiefly to the artistic eye, rather than to the heart or mind. His limited perfection lies in the charm of his genial brightness, his healthy love of things physical, his complete absorption in beauty as he saw it, not only in nature, but in the work of other artists which he was ready to recognize with admirable generosity.

## CHAPTER II

### *A Rose-coloured Waistcoat*

THE first night of *Hernani*, February 25, 1830—"This date," said Gautier, "was epoch-making in our lives. Even after many years, the thrill of that night is present to one in all its intensity!"

The famous rose-coloured waistcoat—Gautier insists on the rose-colour, not the red, as some have asserted, for the redness would have had political significance—the whole point of his gaudy costume was that it should be *moyenageux*. All Hugo's friends insisted on the Middle Ages as the key-note to Romanticism. With the rose-coloured waistcoat Gautier wore light grey trousers with bands of black velvet down the seams. Under his broad hat his long hair hung down below his shoulders. His handsome face, pale and rather solemn, gave him a majestic appearance; and, according to the Goncourts, he looked like a lazy lion.

Why all this excitement over a play by Hugo? It was war against classicism in the theatre, and there was to be much noise pro and con. The Académie Française reminded Charles X that he had a right to stop the performance. "I recognize," replied the King, "merely my right to a seat in the parterre." Gautier and other cohorts of Hugo arrived early at the theatre on the great night, to be sure of good seats, and to dazzle opposition by a display of long hair and bright colours. They came so early

that they brought their dinners with them, and sang songs and ballads of Hugo, and joked and laughed loudly till the curtain rose. There were cheers for Hugo which were answered by the hoots and jeers of the Classicists, and, throughout the play, the audience was a house noisily divided against itself—a condition which continued evening after evening, for neither side would give in. Youth and noise and colour finally triumphed, and the “theatre of Molière” became the house of Hugo for a time.

Hugo's young friends and their followers had been spoiling for a fight, and *Hernani* was a natural and bigger outlet for their bursting enthusiasms than other diversions in which they had been freely indulging—masked balls, quarrels with policemen, meetings of the “Petit Cénacle” where art was discussed with more enthusiasm than profundity, mock-dancing around statues of Racine, word-fights and fist-fights with the conservatives. Professors of the various arts were damned, Academies were despised, the *Prix de Rome* was held to be a disgrace. Auguste Préault was regarded as a great sculptor, Eugène Devéria was said to be better than Veronese, and Louis Boulanger finer than Titian. The “Petit Cénacle” was not the dignified “Cénacle” in which Charles Nodier and Hugo had figured, but it regarded itself as a worthy supporter of the ideals of its prototype, and it was bursting with energy. It carried imitation of Byron to the point of drinking from a human skull as he was supposed to have done at Newstead, and, as in Hugo's *Han d'Islande*, the drink was sometimes sea-water.

And what, after all, was *Hernani*, that they should battle for it? As Brandes has pointed out, Hugo closely



resembles Corneille as a rhetorician; and Paul de Saint-Victor is said to have remarked: "*Hernani* is *Le Cid* in a less civilized setting"; and Strachey has observed that "*Hernani* is a bombastic melodrama full of the stagiest clap-trap and the most turgid declamation. Hugo imagined when he wrote it that he was inspired by Shakespeare. If he was inspired by anyone, it was by Voltaire"—except, be it noted, that Voltaire's dramas have the weak points of Hugo's with none of the latter's imagination and fire. Wild enthusiasms for this sort of thing could not but be temporary. There is much of the college undergraduate in Romanticism in its most self-assertive moments. In his old age Gautier could remember the excitement with pleasure, but he must have regarded its significance with considerable distrust.

Another great memory was his first meeting with Hugo, which was one of the cherished recollections of Théophile's youth.

"I will present you to Hugo to-morrow," said Sainte-Beuve to Gautier when the latter had read aloud to him his poem *La Tête de Mort*, "for you are a man who chooses granite and not smoke as material for sculpture."

This had been a dream of Gautier—to meet the great Hugo; but when taken to his house, Théophile was afraid to knock at so august a portal, and twice ran downstairs to the street, much to the amusement of his less timorous friends, before he could summon sufficient courage. When at last Gautier was presented, Hugo was kindness itself, and talked to him encouragingly. "No sooner was one with Hugo," says Banville in his *Souvenirs*, "than his affectionate welcome made one feel at home." Hugo, unlike

the youthful army of his followers, dressed simply, and was, no doubt, the more impressive in consequence.<sup>1</sup> Arsène Houssaye relates, in his *Confessions*, that Gautier presented him to Hugo in comparison with whom everyone, "even Gautier," appeared small and insignificant. Houssaye was introduced in the following manner: "Oh, great Hugo, I wish to present one of my friends, a poet who comes from the neighbourhood of Racine's birthplace, but you need not hold that fact against him." "Ah!" replied Hugo, "if Racine had not written tragedies, what a great man he would have been, what honour he would have brought to France!"

Gautier never recovered from the impetus given to his youthful critical consciousness against Racine by the idol of 1830. But he lived to regret at least one of Hugo's characteristics—his political activity, which always seemed to him unworthy of so great a poet—"the poet of the mists, the clouds, the rivers and the sea." And Gautier was right in thinking that Hugo's most substantial title to fame is that of poet. It is difficult to assign him any lasting position as a thinker; and when, years later, Henry James regretted his belief that *Toilers of the Sea* had been written entirely from the head, and gave, as a cause for this regret, his "enormous respect for M. Hugo's heart," one feels that the proper note of criticism in regard to M. Hugo has been struck. Hugo was a much appreciated friend to the young Romanticists of Gautier's youth, but it may not all have been disinterested kindness, for Hugo was anxious that the young writers should celebrate his fame, and this he easily succeeded in inducing them to do. Gautier and Leconte de Lisle always expressed their high regard for Hugo's

poetry, the sweep of his fancy, the inexhaustible supply of his images; and, in recent years, when asked whom he regarded as the greatest French poet, André Gide replied: "Victor Hugo, alas!" He will no doubt continue to be praised chiefly as poet.

Hugo's definitions of Romanticism were vague, for he disliked too definite hard-and-fast classifications. They reminded him of seventeenth-century theories of literary value. It was more, in his mind, a question of spirit than of manner, for he said in 1824 that he did not exactly know what a "classic" style meant in contra-distinction to the "romantic." In his preface to *Hernani* he wrote: "Romanticism is nothing more than liberalism in literature. France greatly admired the writings of the time of Louis XIV which were so well calculated to give pleasure to the monarchy, but she will also know how to appreciate a national and non-personal literature—she who is this actual France of the nineteenth century to whom Mirabeau gave freedom, and Napoleon power."

### CHAPTER III

#### *Romanticism*

*"Que de choses dans ce sacré 19<sup>e</sup> siècle. C'est que, sacristi, il y en a pour tous les goûts!"*

MANETTE SALOMAN, p. 324.

WHAT was Romanticism? What was its rise and growth, and what followed it?

"Romanticism was not born in France," wrote the Goncourts. "It was to come to us like a tropical plant from the new world. Bernandin de Sainte-Pierre imported it from the Mauritius, and Chateaubriand from America." Its roots, however, were deep in the soil of France, and the great originator of Romanticism, the great source of its inspiration, was Rousseau, whose teachings were no less powerfully operative upon the political and social aspects of the French Revolution than upon the literary theories which followed the national upheaval.

Rousseau's influence on Chateaubriand was fundamental, and if Chateaubriand may be called the "father of Romanticism," to use Gautier's expression, Rousseau was its grandfather. The great disciples of Chateaubriand were Byron and Hugo; and, with Hugo, Romanticism triumphed in 1830. There had been in Chateaubriand and Lamartine a sentimental, religious, Immanuelistic side of literature of which many people had grown very weary, and this helped the rise into favour of Hugo's sterner stuff. "The French

Romantic School," says Brandes, "may without exaggeration be regarded as the greatest literary school of the nineteenth century," yet it should be noted that some of the greatest French writers of the nineteenth century (Flaubert, Balzac, Baudelaire, Leconte de Lisle) cannot strictly be called Romanticists. The use, however, of any term of definite descriptive literary classification is always subject to exceptions and qualities in various writers that tend to narrow the applicability of the word. It is comparatively easy to define Romanticist and Naturalist, but difficult to find writers whose works justify an exact use of the epithet. And if one groups the Romanticists and Naturalists on the one hand as, in general, distinguished from the Classicists on the other, one finds that some of the Romanticists are classic in form, and that some of the Naturalists are romantic in their choice of subjects. The classic impeccability of the styles of Flaubert, Gautier, Baudelaire and Mérimée is not a Romanticist characteristic, and is altogether independent of Romanticist or Naturalistic qualities of point of view and method, and the above-mentioned writers have almost nothing in common except their love of a finished style and a beautiful form.

Therefore it is convenient to use the term Romanticism simply to indicate the exuberant revolt from the narrowest restraints which the doctrines of the seventeenth century had imposed, and to show how Romanticism changed and developed from this point of departure. The early Romanticists are like the political leaders of the French Revolution in their effort for freedom, and the general theorist prepared the way for the practical reformer. Very much as Rousseau was largely, though indirectly, responsible for



the early victories of the Revolutionists, so Chateaubriand, Béranger and others paved the way for the Revolution of 1830, and later writers, Thiers among them, for that of 1848. These men were always more or less concerned with politics. But Gautier, Flaubert and kindred spirits not only ignored such interests but thoroughly distrusted a merit which was popular. Leconte de Lisle and Flaubert scorned Béranger, denying him all the qualities of the true artist. The indiscreet Béranger once told Leconte de Lisle that he could compose poems like Byron's, especially while sleeping. "Ah! mon cher maître," replied Leconte de Lisle, "why don't you sleep for ever?" Baudelaire agreed with Leconte de Lisle that France had never really loved or understood poetry, and that Béranger was as good a poet as France deserved. And, worst of all, he was *bourgeois*—that, in itself, was enough.

The Romanticists dreamed of the Orient, the colour of distant lands, the luxury and warmth of the South and East. Napoleon's oriental aspirations were not literary, but he had pointed the way, and his sumptuous Romanticism was in the air. Faure notes that most of the leading Romanticists were born at the time of Napoleon's triumphs:—Vigny in 1797, Delacroix in 1798, Balzac in 1799, Dumas in 1800, Hugo in 1802, Daumier in 1808, Musset in 1810 and Gautier in 1811. And he adds that Baudelaire, Taine, Flaubert, on the other hand, were the sons of those who returned to France drunk with the glory, slaughter and fatigue of the wars of the First Empire, and that the more sober Naturalists were much influenced by the military reverses of the Second Empire.

"In the Romanticist army," wrote Gautier, referring to



the literary enthusiasm of 1830, "everyone was young, as in Napoleon's Army of Italy. . . . What a time in which to live! Scott, Byron and Shakespeare were being discovered for the first time in France." According to the *Confessions* of Houssaye, it was proclaimed that Shakespeare was God and Hugo his prophet.

As a side-light on Napoleon's Romanticist significance, it is interesting to observe how differently the writers of the early nineteenth century treated the subject of war. There can be no greater contrast than between the descriptions of Waterloo in *Les Misérables* and in *La Chartreuse de Parme*—the rhetorical flights, the brilliantly coloured exaggerations of Hugo, and the realistic adherence to less inspiring aspects of battle coupled with a humour which Stendhal had cultivated during his youthful experiences in Napoleon's army. The story of *L'Enlèvement de la Redoute*, one of Mérimée's masterpieces, may be set in contrast to the more romantic attitude of Dumas, and especially to that of Balzac in that extraordinary portrayal of the psychology of hero-worship (the soldier's story, in *The Country Doctor*), and to the historico-romantic projections of Scott. And, one notes, for further contrast, that the gloom of the end of the Second Empire haunts the pages of Zola's *La Débâcle*. There was a greater romanticism in the wars of the First Empire than in those of the Second.

A writer's best work is usually, partly, at least, autobiographical, and this is certainly true of the authors of the early Romanticist period. They were immensely introspective; they devoted long pages to personal experience. They found food for inspiration in their own sorrows no

less than in those of foreign extraction. Again the example of Rousseau sets the pace. His *Confessions*, with all their defects of incompleteness and of special pleading, are nevertheless his most lastingly interesting contribution to literature. When *La Nouvelle Héloïse* shall have been still more permanently relegated to dusty corners than at present, there will probably be readers for the *Confessions*. And the *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe* are still absorbing, though no one can be expected to thoroughly enjoy Chateaubriand's novels. There is no more fascinating document of literary personality and anecdote than the *Journal des Goncourts*, but *Manette Saloman*, *Charles Demailly* and other fictional works of the brothers inseparable show the heavy hand of time. If one finds the *Autobiography* of Goethe unevenly endowed with the power to attract, can one say more for *Werther* and *Wilhelm Meister*? Similarly it may be said that many of the novels of the period which maintain their power do so as the result of the autobiographical element. Adolphe is essentially a portrait of Benjamin Constant—a better likeness than René of Chateaubriand, and certainly more convincingly drawn, for the character is more clearly set down, and the features are not marred by the process of fading which is the result of a mixture of too much sentiment with the other elements of representation.

Melancholy was invented by Chateaubriand, said Gautier. It was a disease which spread rapidly. Byron caught it and, from him, many others. It became fashionable to be miserable, and in spite of the painful reality of much woe, there proved to be ways of enjoying poor health. Even Gautier tempered a natural buoyancy with periods

of depression, but the fashionable melancholy was never his. Musset's beautifully expressed anguish, Lamartine's sighs of religio-sentimental piety, Sainte-Beuve's moans and groans of the disappointed poet and lover, filled the air with pitiful strains. Borel and Nerval killed themselves. Flaubert worked himself to death in the cause of impossible perfections. Baudelaire, in horror of the platitudes of normality, sought safety in a fatal accumulation of eccentricities. The Goncourts were sad and worn; life for the most part was a serious, documentary business, and there seemed comparatively little evidence for true or lasting happiness. The taste for gloom could not annihilate so great a genius as Baudelaire's, for his peculiarities were superficial. There were, indeed, men whose genius thrived on healthiness. Hugo, Balzac and Gautier could be content to leave opium out of their diets, and refrain from dyeing their hair. They boldly felt no shame when they happened to enjoy something or other quite commonly regarded as pleasant.

Chateaubriand's René felt that the fact of his being misunderstood proved his superior worth; but was this superior worthiness really admirable, even in his own estimation? "I am virtuous without pleasure, and, if I were a criminal, I should have no remorse. I wish that I had never been born, or that I might be for ever forgotten." René was intended by his author to illustrate a moral truth. The point of his story was to "show the utility of religion, and to stimulate a love for it." Guilty passions brought retribution, yet in deserved punishment there was a certain relish. Popular sympathy was generally scorned, but might one not be excused for hoping that the public would weep over

a death which the victim could regard with a tinge of voluptuous satisfaction? And must one be reminded that the same mourners would shed tears over the corpse of a Béranger? There was no accounting for tastes.

"Love is a prayer for two," wrote Lamartine, and turned his eyes upward like a Guido-Reni saint, or perhaps he dropped a tear upon the manuscript. How touching is Lamartine's love for animals, how beautiful his condescension: "Come, little dog, and lick my hand. Think not that before God himself I would blush for thee!"

The various threads of Romanticist development would fill a volume, and include a most extraordinary collection of contributing factors; eighteenth-century elements, variations on Romanticist themes, naturalistic, realistic and symbolistic outgrowths. In the full tide of Romanticism, Théodore de Banville wrote in a thoroughly classic form, and the satanistic subject-matter of Baudelaire was moulded into strictly measured verses. The flawless polish of eighteenth-century conversation had given place to the less restrained flow of talk which Diderot would have preferred to the manner of those whose sensibilities he had shocked; his eloquence would have been more in the tone of Gautier's colorful exaggerations in heated arguments with his friends. The eighteenth-century short-story or *conte* was modified in the nineteenth century by a broadening of scope, but there is something of the atmosphere and wit of the tales of Crébillon *fil*s in a few of Gautier's stories, and those of Mérimée have an eighteenth-century precision and directness.

The Middle Ages and the Renaissance appealed strongly to the Romanticists. There is the very obvious influence

of Rabelais in the *Contes Drolâtiques* of Balzac, and one finds a similar strain in Gautier and Dumas, a good-natured joviality and an enjoyment of the broadest humour, or what some people would call gross coarseness. Balzac mimicked rather than successfully achieved the essential greatness of Rabelais, and in Gautier and Dumas the attempt itself was more indirect and accidental. Poetic influences centred chiefly in Ronsard and the "Pléiade," with a fondness for Villon less keenly felt, perhaps, but sincere as far as admiration carried it. Villon lived turbulently in a turbulent age, and the life of young writers of his time was as wild or wilder than that of the "Army of 1830." Villon's romanticism had not the element of morbid sensitiveness of so many of his friends of 400 years later, and they liked his recklessness. Gautier proclaimed the greatness of Ronsard, partly as a blow at Boileau and the Classicists, for he could never forget Malherbe's and Boileau's instrumentality in the overthrow of Ronsard. Under the standard of Ronsard the Romanticists attacked what they called "Perruquinism," the formal and bewigged pomposity of the seventeenth century. Flaubert joined Gautier in the chorus that sang the praises of Ronsard: "What a poet! What wings! He is greater than Virgil, and at times, in lyric passages, he rivals Goethe." Gautier found in Théophile de Viau—his favourite poet next to Ronsard—an expression of the same ideas which the Romanticists of 1830 were called audaciously original for having uttered four centuries later.

"Modern poetry," wrote Leconte de Lisle in 1852, "is the blurred image of the fiery personality of Byron, the sensual and factitious religionism of Chateaubriand, the



mystic reveries of German thought, the realism of the Lake poets. It is in a state of decline." Leconte de Lisle felt that the Romanticism of Hugo had weakened, and that a new and strengthening impulse was needed in French poetry, a building up of form, a restraint of the element of personal feeling. The "Parnasse," the result of Leconte de Lisle's efforts, was, in its turn, to give place to the disciples of Symbolism, who broke away from one set of rigid rules just as the Romanticists had denounced another. Leconte de Lisle's efforts for the architectural integrity of poetry were supplemented by the novelists of Gautier's maturity and old age, who were much impressed by the purity, clarity and other formal excellencies of the novels of Turgenev. This was the school of Flaubert and, later, of Maupassant, and it was in sympathy with the scientific realism of the type of novel advocated by the Goncourts which bore fruit in the much-misunderstood and essentially humanitarian productions of Zola. Meanwhile Sainte-Beuve, till 1869, wielded the sceptre of taste distinctly sentimental in its action counter to the rising tide of realism, to the entrance into literature of subjects which he thought would be suitable only for experiments in laboratories, and which would end in the destruction of Romanticism, and, more essentially, in his mind, of good taste; for Sainte-Beuve readily approved of the precursors of Romanticism, and heartily disliked its successors.

The Romanticists profited by a vast variety of foreign influence. The chief sources of inspiration were Byron, Shakespeare and Scott. In eighteenth-century France almost no one understood the great Elizabethan, for the absurd reason that Racine's type of restraint made Shake-



speare seem crude to cultivated Frenchmen as well as to the general public. Hugo's enormous admiration of him—an admiration more intense than profound—was bound to have its influence on the Romanticists, as did everything that Hugo thought. Byron is a better example of the influence of Chateaubriand than of English stimulus felt in France, though many Frenchmen appreciated Byron's poetry, and he was more universally admired on the Continent than at home. The Lake poets were not so widely known and, if any Frenchmen read them exhaustively, they were Sainte-Beuve and Leconte de Lisle. Scott, on the other hand, became extremely popular in Paris, and his following was more numerous and faithful than those of Byron and Shakespeare. Balzac was a most ardent advocate of Scott's greatness, and understood his genius for character-drawing. In his preface to the *Comédie Humaine* Balzac attributes the source of the general idea of that great work to the series of Scott's historical romances, his plan being, however, for a sequence much more closely knit together than that of the Scotch novelist. Balzac insisted that Scott was to stand the test of time far better than Dumas, and, in his opinion, there was none of the shallowness of which later critics have in some cases felt the presence in the novels of Sir Walter. Mérimée at first took Scott for his model, but his realistic methods soon led him in other directions. Dumas' point of view is really more closely akin to Scott's than either Balzac's or Mérimée's, but Dumas' Romanticism lacks certain poetic elements of Scott's power. In 1823 Hugo wrote *Han d'Islande* directly under the guidance of his impressions of Scott's processes, and at this time Scott's works were amazingly

popular, for those of a foreigner, in Paris. In 1815, when Sir Walter had visited Paris, he was practically unknown, and when he returned in 1826 it was thought that his appearance was disappointingly devoid of the expected glamour. His popularity, none the less, continued, in spite, also, of the dislike which was felt by most Frenchmen for his *History of Napoleon*. Scott recorded in his diary—October 31, 1826—"We saw *Ivanhoe* at the Odéon, superbly staged. . . . It was an opera, and the story sadly mangled, and the dialogue in great part nonsense," but, after all, it probably occurred to Scott that one can expect very little of an opera libretto. The slaughter-house of novels is both the opera and the moving-picture, in our day.

In Germany, the beginnings of Romanticism were the work of Schlegel and Hoffmann; Schlegel's novel *Lucinde*, a work little-known in France, was the first definite form in which Romanticism expressed itself. The *Tales* of Hoffmann and the poetry of Heine were largely operative on the French writers of the time, and Heine was the only German poet whom the French regarded as one of their own, which may be partly due to the years he spent in Paris, and to his being a personal friend of Gautier and others. The Goncourts said that, compared to Heine, all modern poets seemed like commercial travellers. "The German Romanticists," writes Brandes, "loved twilight and moonshine. But what is even Novalis's love of night in comparison with Joseph de Maistre's glorification of darkness?" The German nature is frequently given to excess, and it is easy to imagine what the result of Romanticist sentimentality became on the other side of the Rhine:—

worse than anywhere else. Gautier, after reading, at the age of nineteen, the *Fantastic Tales* of Hoffmann, remarked that he felt as if he had imbibed ten bottles of champagne. He was a particularly ardent admirer of Hoffmann's genius for satire and caricature, and the realism which he combined with sustained narrative interest and the special qualities of his imagination—a rare assortment of gifts. Balzac's story, *Le Peau de Chagrin*, though so differently treated, had its titular source in a tale of Hoffmann, and there was much in the German writer which Balzac could praise with his emphatic enthusiasm. The influence of the best German music deserved to be far greater in France than it was. Weber, so much less important than Wagner, stood for the essence of Romanticism in music, and Gautier, who, except for Baudelaire, was almost alone in his understanding of Wagner's greatness, had the popular opinion of Weber. Baudelaire expressed his disgust at the bad taste of Parisian audiences that hissed the first performances of Wagner's operas. *Faust* was not appreciated by the French—certainly not by Gounod if he thought his music an adequate setting for Goethe's drama, in relation to which it is no more fitting than his score of *Romeo and Juliet* is appropriate for that play. The vogue of Goethe's *Werther* was out of all proportion to the merits of that novel, but some of the critics of the early and later nineteenth century were aware of its faults. It is certainly apparent that the excellence of *Manon Lescaut* far surpassed that of other writings of this sort which continued to be produced. Goethe himself, in later years, felt that the success of *Werther* was due to its reflection of the dominating but not the best qualities of the spirit of its time. It

had first appeared in 1774 (thirteen years before the publication of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*) and both works show the sentimental bias of much of the literature of France and Germany near the close of the eighteenth century. Goethe was more highly praised by Romantic Germany than by the compatriots of his earlier years, and as an example of the worst kind of German adulation one may quote a professor at Berlin who expressed the wish that he were a fish deliciously cooked and served for the gratification of Goethe's culinary taste.

The Romantic movement was felt in Spain, Italy and Russia, but in no degree comparable to that of its activity in France, England and Germany. The wealth of its artistic production is prodigious, and it is impossible to estimate which of the arts reached the point of highest emotional expression in this new burst of creative inspiration. It may be said that the music of Mozart is of the essence of the wit, the grace, the charm, the distinction of the eighteenth century; and one finds the grandeur, the heroic passion of Romanticism in Wagner, and its qualities of exquisite sensitiveness, its profound and incurable melancholy, and an absence of affectation and sentimentality (the presence of which mars so much of the art of this period) in the music of Chopin.

## CHAPTER IV

### *A Southern Boy Goes North*

GAUTIER's family came from the neighbourhood of Avignon, where they owned a hill called Avançon, and called themselves the Gautiers d'Avançon—a title first held by Théophile's great-uncle whom Louis XV had ennobled for services in the department of state finance. Théophile's grandfather was fond of the country, and especially of hunting, and lived to be an hundred years old. His son Pierre acquired a better education; he was a devoted Royalist at the time of the Revolution, and, later, married the daughter of a count whose friend, the Abbé de Montesquieu, lent her and Pierre his Château d'Artagnan for their honeymoon.

At Tarbes, near Barrère, in the Pyrénées, where M. and Mme. Gautier were living in 1811, Théophile was born on the last of August, and though he left Tarbes at the age of three, and lived most of his life in Paris, he always remembered the warm southern border, and never cared for the colder northern climate. His parents settled in the rue du Parc-Royal, in the Marais, and Théophile was so homesick for Tarbes that he tried to jump out of the window, after throwing his toys into the street, and could not be persuaded to go to sleep till he had been promised that he should return to Tarbes with his family next day. He decided that his father and mother were lost in Paris since they continued to stay there, and one day, walking with his



nurse, he heard some soldiers talking in the Gascon *patois* as they marched, and he cried: "Let's follow them! They come from where we live, and will show us the way back."

Théophile was sent to the Collège Louis-le-Grand at the age of eight. He hated school. "I was," he says, "a gentle, sad, weakly child, with an olive-coloured skin which astonished my fair-faced young comrades. I looked like a homesick, chilly little Cuban Spaniard sent to Paris to be educated." As his health was poor he took no interest in sports and, consequently, the other boys teased him, and he thought them too rough. He disliked the discipline, the cheerlessness of the school-rooms, the poor food, the cold corridors. He was allowed more liberty in the Collège Charlemagne to which he was transferred, but his shyness made his memories painful, and in later years he was glad to recall the hours he spent at home. He adored reading, his father had a considerable library and helped him with his studies, in which he was ambitious for Théophile to excel. No book ever moved the Gautier of these or later years so deeply as *Paul et Virginie*. His memory was such that one evening he recited, word for word, a long poem which he had read that day for the first time.

Before many years it occurred to Théophile that he might develop himself physically to advantage. The Goncourts relate that, in later years, Gautier told them he had written to Lecour, a physical culturist, to call on him, and had said: "I wish to have muscles such as one sees in a bas-relief." Lecour examined him and pronounced it possible. Gautier was told to eat five pounds of rare mutton, to drink three bottles of Bordeaux, and to work two hours with his



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instructor every day. Gautier adds that he provided himself with a strong and buxom mistress and dismissed the sickly one he had. The result of these excellent expedients was that he succeeded in registering as high as five hundred and twenty, with a blow of his fist, on a punching machine, a record of which Gautier was always very proud. He learned to swim in the Seine, and once swam from Marseilles to the Château d'If, a feat which pleased him as much as if he had been Byron crossing the Hellespont.

## CHAPTER V

### *From Brush to Pen*

IN his student-days Gautier would have been astonished, and not much pleased, if anyone had told him he was to become a journalist. Much of his spare time at the Collège Charlemagne was spent in studying the sculpture and paintings of the museums of Paris. He would look at a single masterpiece for hours. He met the painter Rioult who had a studio near the Collège, and he was to wish, in later years, that he had devoted all his time to working with him. "It gives me a certain pleasure," he remarked, "to say: 'What a fine painter I should have been! If I had continued my painting I should have covered my canvases with nymphs, goddesses, cupids, madonnas and cherubs.'" Almost the only painting of an ambitious sort which Gautier ever finished was for a village church near the Château d'Artagnan where he spent one of his vacations with his family, visiting his mother's old friend, the Abbé de Montesquieu. Early in 1830, however, Gautier's friends consisted more and more of writers who took an interest in his first attempts at poetry, and they persuaded him to forsake the brush for the pen, though Rioult had been of the contrary opinion, and had done what he could to encourage his pupil.

"Physical beauty, as perfect as the Greek type, is the only gift of which I have always been envious," said Gautier; and according to the accounts written by the friends

of his youth, and the pictures of him as a young man, he had reason to be rather satisfied with his appearance, which, however, he did not always improve by his choice of costume. He was seen at one of the salons where he officiated as critic, "in a shocking bad hat, attached to the back of his head by some process of adhesion known to himself alone, masses of dishevelled hair hanging anywhere but in the right place, and, catalogue in hand, making or destroying reputations by the glance of his eye or the stroke of his pen." Feydeau describes him at the age of twenty-nine as having hair of a dark chestnut colour, and looking like a Merovingian on account of his life-long lack of a haircut, in spite of the more contemporary elements in the picture—the black velvet vest, long trousers, Turkish slippers of yellow leather. He walked bare-headed, with a cigar in his mouth, and covered his head with an umbrella, rather than a hat, when it rained. This he did because he happened to care to, and partly because he felt reasonably sure that even such a slight peculiarity would bewilder the bourgeois. "His appearance," continues Feydeau, "bespoke a majestic but gentle nature."

"*Fortunio* is the last book," wrote Gautier to Sainte-Beuve in 1863, "in which I have freely stated what I really think. In later works I have been forced to abide by journalistic conventionalities." The ideas expressed in *Fortunio*—which he calls in his preface a hymn to beauty, richness and good luck in the colours of marble, gold and purple—are typical of Oriental life in contrast to the less gorgeous, less luxurious, less sunny side of France. One finds the same partialities extolled in *Le Roi Candaule*, *Une Nuit de Cléopâtre*, *Le Roman de la Momie*, and other stories in

which Gautier is chiefly remarkable for exquisite beauty of description. He groaned over modern industrial and transportational innovations, and thought that the life of Western Europe was becoming more and more drab, ugly, uninteresting, and not even pre-eminently useful, for he thought the only really useful things were pleasure and art for their own sakes. He thought that the world's noblest prize should be awarded to the man who could invent a new pleasure. His friends called him *le bon Théo*; they found his conversation delightful, his manners charming. He was companionable to the extent of preferring to work surrounded by his family and friends.

Gautier loved animals; the descriptions of the dog and cat in *Le Capitaine Fracasse* testify to this. His love of cats was so great that some of his friends feared he might erect altars to them in Egyptian fashion. He understood animals better than women, whom he liked to regard as merely beautiful slaves—an attitude which was part of his general orientalism. His superstitions were numerous. He feared the "evil eye," and is said to have broken with his friend Offenbach on hearing that he was thus afflicted. He hated and feared death, and felt that he would surely die if he went to a doctor. He was convinced that, if there is a future life, it must be like the present, full of injustice and the triumphs of imbecility and mediocrity. What he dreaded most was the death of the body, for he could think of nothing more horrible than the decline of physical beauty into a condition of ugliness and decay.

"I understand a statue perfectly," said Gautier, "but I do not understand a human being. I have always preferred a statue to a woman and marble to flesh. A beau-



Theophile Gautier est de ce poil enroulé  
 Né coiffé: quel temps, puisqu'il n'en aime point  
 systématiquement, que de la belle forme  
 Il devrait bien changer celle de ses cheveux

## GAUTIER

From a cartoon in "Le Charivari," 1839.

[The jingle says: "Theophile Gautier was born with this enormous head of hair. What a wig! Since he is systematically in love with nothing but beautiful form, he really ought to change the form of his coiffure."].





tiful form *is* a beautiful idea, for what is a form that expresses nothing? The form gives birth to the idea," or, in the words of Flaubert and the Goncourts, a true writer thinks in a literary style and conceives, by a single mental process, the form and the subject of his work. Gautier's trinity of beautiful things consisted of Gold, Purple and Marble, which is sufficient demonstration of the objectivity of his method. He told the Goncourts that he thought *sensibilité* an inferior quality, and he was satisfied that he had suppressed in his writings as much as possible of that which is vulgarly described as "heart interest." Yet, again, it comes down to a question of definition. Baudelaire found sentiment, not sentimentality, in Gautier's writings. Elsewhere he remarks: "There is no great painter without great ideas." What is a great idea? It must include significant interpretation, a strikingly profound originality which Gautier does not attain by identifying form and idea. It is enough to demand of the lover of form that the form he creates be beautiful. It is enough to demand of a great thinker that his thought be inspiring, and that it seem to us important. Obviously a man is not a great thinker because his form of expression is perfect, nor is an idea a great one simply for the reason that it is expressed in a perfect form.

## CHAPTER VI

### *Phrases that Land on their Feet*

"IN the morning," said Gautier to the Goncourts, "I wake myself my dreaming that I am hungry. When I have eaten, I smoke. By this time it is eleven A. M. I draw up a chair, spread my writing materials on a table, and my instrument of torture is ready, for it has always wearied me to write, and, besides, how useless is the process! Well, I begin to write, nevertheless; not fast, not with much forethought. My sentence-structure is all in order in my mind. I throw my phrases in the air, and I am certain that, like cats, they will manage to land on their feet. It is very simple; it requires merely an established sentence-structure. I would undertake to teach anyone to write. Look at my manuscripts—you will find no erasures. . . . There has never been merit in taking a long time to do a little."

One remembers a story in some memoir of Racine, who is reported to have remarked:

"I have just finished a tragedy."

"When will it be performed?" asks a friend.

"Very soon. I have only to write it."

Gautier's facility was famous. His phrases, verses and other feline creations—to use his own metaphor—did land gracefully on their feet, and the style of his newspaper articles is as finished as that of his poems and narratives. It was actually easier for him at times to write his prose first in verse. Girardin once told him, in effect, that his style

was too good, that the public did not like it; to which he might have replied, like Henry James on a similar occasion: "I regret that my newspaper articles are really the *worst* that I can consider doing." Balzac once remarked that there were only three writers in Paris who thoroughly understood the language they employed: "Hugo, Gautier and myself."—And surely no three writers ever wrote in styles more distinctly dissimilar than these. Saintsbury observed that "style-craft and story-craft so perfectly married as to be one flesh seem to belong in perfection to three writers only, in this volume [the second half of his *History of the French Novel*]*—Gautier, Mérimée and Flaubert, with de Maupassant as a possible fourth.*"

Gautier wrote *Mademoiselle de Maupin* in six weeks. He was still living in Paris with his parents, and sometimes his father would refuse to let him leave the house till he had finished ten pages. His mother thought he was working too hard, and would devise an escape which he now and then managed by himself, through a window. Gautier, whether to escape imprisonment of this sort or for other reasons, changed his lodgings soon after the publication of *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, to which he had written a violent, platitudinous and bourgeois-shocking preface, much admired by the young Romanticists, containing the following tirade: "No, you imbeciles, idiots and goitrous persons, a book is not useful for the cooking of gelatinous soup, a novel is not a seamless shoe, nor is a sonnet a perpetually squirting syringe. A drama is not a railroad nor any other civilizing invention created for the progress of humanity. By the bowels of all the popes, past, present and to come, No! two hundred thousand times No!"

"*Mademoiselle de Maupin*," writes Godefroy, "is one of the saddest products of materialistic literature. All vice is justified, even the indulgence in perversity."

Swinburne wrote a sonnet to the novel:

"This is the golden book of spirit and sense,  
The holy writ of beauty . . ."

"I am charmed by *Mademoiselle de Maupin*," wrote Delacroix; and Balzac admired its "magnificent preface," and called the book "a courageous performance—one of the most original, artistic, fresh and vigorous productions of our time," and after reading it he tried at once to persuade Gautier to write for the "*Chronique de Paris*," and placed a quotation from *Mademoiselle de Maupin* on the title-page of his novel *Honorine*. Baudelaire wrote: "In *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, Greek beauty is staunchly defended in the full tide of Romantic exuberance. . . . This story, this painting of a dream, the Hymn to Beauty establishes the truth of the prime necessity for the creation of works of art, of an exclusive love of Beauty."

The book has been regarded as shocking for a variety of reasons, one of which is Gautier's choice of physical passion as a figure of speech by which to express a rapturous, spiritual love of Beauty in the abstract. The colour and music of the style, however, should appeal even to those of fastidious scruple; and examples are more effective, from this point of view, in the original than in translation: "*Virginité, plante amère, née sous un sol trempé de sang, et dont la fleur étoilée et malade s'ouvre péniblement à*



*l'ombre humide des cloîtres, sous une froide pluie lustrale—  
rose sans parfum, et toute hérissée d'épines, tu as remplacé  
pour nous les belles et joyeuses roses baignées de nard et de  
falerne des danseuses de Sybaris."*

## CHAPTER VII

### *Romanticist Eccentricities*

"LOOK at Gavarni's pictures," wrote Gautier, "if you want to see the Parisians of 1830, the costumes, the types of faces, the characters, the manners." And many features of the history of the time are to be seen in the work of Daumier and Delacroix. There was much in the years between 1830 and 1834 to occupy the genius for caricature of Daumier's hand. He worked with Balzac for the periodical called "La Caricature" at this time. The wit of Daumier's drawings followed Charles X in his exile, and Louis-Philippe suffered no less than his predecessor from the same source. "In the early days of the Second Empire," writes Henry James, "Daumier still plied his coarse and formidable pencil." When asked who was his master in the art of painting, Daumier replied: "Molière"—and there is a kindliness and good-nature in his work on which this remark throws light. His attitude toward the oft-persecuted bourgeois is significant. "The bourgeois of Daumier," says Nazzi, "is not the bourgeois who thinks basely, as Flaubert described the type, but one who doesn't think at all, and whose chief interests are those of his stomach. The caricaturist was less ferocious than the novelist." If there is such a thing as good-natured malice, Daumier and Gavarni may be said to have it. At any rate, in both cases, one is (and was) sure at times of good-natured intent, and, at others, of malicious. On one of the latter

occasions Daumier found himself temporarily imprisoned in 1832 for having spoken too freely of the governmental peculiarities of the moment. It is not so with Delacroix. His work is an example of broader aspects of the characteristics of the time, especially the Oriental leanings of Romanticist adventure.

Costumes:—There were Spanish mantillas, coats with broad, velvet lapels, pointed doublets or jerkins of satin or damask velvet. In France, the absence of haircuts and of shaves became the badge of Romanticism. There was Petrus Borel, at one time the hero of the "Petit Cénacle," whose pale, handsome face resembled that of a Spaniard or Arab. He walked along the streets of Paris with his hat down over one eye, his cloak hung from one shoulder in Spanish style. There was Jean du Seigneur, who wore a velvet-lined coat, and a taffeta necktie puffed out in a large bow, the ends flying wide.

"It was the fashion," wrote Gautier, "to be pale and greenish-looking; to appear to be wasted by the pangs of passion and remorse; to talk sadly and fantastically about death." This lugubrious manner was relieved by dissipation, and meetings were held in honour of Hugo at which his poems were sung or recited by the hour; *Hernani* was learned by heart, and the spirit of the Middle Ages was celebrated in a variety of ways. Jean was spelt Jehan; Celestin Nanteuil (described as Elias Wilmanstadius in Gautier's story of that name) wore armour or other ancient costumes, felt perfectly at ease only in the shadow of cathedrals, lived in a house as mediæval as possible, especially lacking in all kinds of conveniences; used as many mediæval words as he could learn, and generally glorified himself

in the eyes of his friends. Gérard de Nerval went about the streets crying "Down with the bourgeois!" till he was imprisoned for disturbing the peace. Borel and a few companions started forth on a crazy trip to Rouen with ribbons flying from their hats. They were caught and held till word came from Paris that they were harmless. At one time Borel decided to live like a primitive man in the heart of Paris—an old deserted house in the rue de la Rochechouart. In hot weather he and his friends wore no clothes, made a great deal of noise and were frequently arrested. In 1832 a fête had been given for Dumas. Borel and his friends planned a mock imitation of the feast, invited Dumas, and gave a wild orgy in his honour. One of the rooms was used as an infirmary for the "dead drunk," as set forth in Gautier's story *Le Bol de Punch* in *Les Jeune France*. Borel, who had been hailed as a writer of infinite promise, died a day-labourer, all his ambition gone, though he had written some things of a certain merit. In 1832 Gautier decided to become a Saint-Simonian, but gave up the idea as soon as he discovered he would have to wear a costume that did not appeal to him. Having been arrested for neglecting his duties in military training, he presented himself for drill in grey trousers, yellow waistcoat set with blue flowers, a green dress-coat, with gold buttons, a rose-coloured necktie, a soft collar, a policeman's cap, and carried an ancient musket which he had borrowed from a collector. Of course he was severely reprimanded. He ran to Maxime Du Camp for refuge, and was given a room where his host heard him discussing literature with someone or other at all hours of the night. After fifteen days he

emerged only to be arrested promptly—all this because he hated drab clothes.

Less given to extremity of eccentricity than Borel, but touched with more fundamental madness, Gérard de Nerval was one of Gautier's most cherished friends, and one of the most lovable, sensitive and truly pathetic of the young artists of the time. Gérard was a dreamer, more original and imaginative than Gautier. There was a kindliness even in his irony. "In all the memoirs of the period," writes Delvau, "I have found only expressions of friendliness toward Gérard. He never hated anyone nor anything, not even the stupidity and imbecility of persons who annoyed him." Gautier found Gérard difficult to talk to for he never ceased to wander about the room in a nervous way. He did much of his writing while walking about Paris, and his pockets were always full of scribbled notes on one thing and another. For a time he lived in a hut on the Île Louvier; later, on Montmartre, where he seemed to know everyone; children loved him and he would talk and play with them by the hour. He frequently changed his lodgings, taking with him a parrot with which he conversed at length. They seemed to understand each other perfectly. He had no idea of applying himself to any definite task, and when his friends told him he would never accomplish anything by his shiftless manner of living, he thought them cruel. He continued to write spasmodically, to wander at night, to meet and talk to labourers going to work early in the morning, and to dream during the day.

Gérard was three years younger than Gautier, whom he first met in the Collège Charlemagne, not long after Gau-

tier had been brought, as a small boy, to Paris. In later years Gérard's father, who wanted him to become a doctor, particularly objected to his literary ambitions since they apparently involved going about with Gautier and his peculiar friends. But he inherited some money and henceforth devoted himself to the life he liked—trips to Italy, the Orient, and the writing of books of various sorts:—travel, newspaper articles, a translation of *Faust*, a biographical study of Restif de la Bretonne, and occasional poems.

The happiest period of his life was the time he spent (1833-34) with Gautier, Arsène Houssaye and Camille Rogier in the Impasse du Doyenné (near the old building that had been the Hôtel de Rambouillet), in the Place du Carrousel, which no longer exists. Rogier, being the richest, had the biggest room, and he had decorated it with his own paintings, with elaborate wainscoting and dull, old-fashioned mirrors and leaded-glass windows. Gautier and his friends spent many hours in these hospitable quarters, and he regarded them as the pleasantest of his life. There were frequent entertainments, the neighbours were annoyed by the noisy revels and by the sounds of a cabaret orchestra which, after playing loudly in Rogier's apartment, was sometimes escorted with singing and shouting to the nearby ruins of the old Chapelle du Doyenné where, among the trees, a sort of wayside inn offered further amusement. According to Houssaye, there were costume-balls, fêtes, amateur theatricals in which well-known actors and actresses occasionally took part. At any hour of the day, Gautier might be expected to enter the room, to throw himself into a Louis XIII chair which would collapse under him, or,



otherwise, to divert those present. Gérard would stretch himself on one of the beds with an old lamp on his head, and read till he went to sleep and the lamp fell with a crash. In one of the rooms there might be seen an author writing by the fire, a poet making rhymes in a hammock and Gautier lying on the floor, stroking a cat while he busied himself in exercising his excellent penmanship. Gavarni would help Rogier with his drawings; Delacroix would often drop in for a chat, and Dumas would come to see what was going on. Rogier and his friends usually dined at a restaurant, often went to the theatre, and were known at times to do hard work. At one of the suppers in Rogier's lodgings, Gérard suggested that the handsome old woodwork be smeared with frescoes—or so the proprietor of the place regarded their work, though Corot himself had assisted in the decorative effort. Various persons contributed to the furnishings. One day Gérard brought in two panels by Fragonard for which he asserted he had paid fifty francs, and Rogier painted nudes which his landlord said were so shocking that he could not enter the room. This was excellent; the nudes remained.

There was a strange assortment of furniture in Gérard's room, the most remarkable specimen of which was a huge old bed which had been installed with great difficulty. The door had had to be enlarged, like the gateways of cities which had been too small for the coaches of Louis XIV. Gérard's bed was a four-poster, carved à la François I, and supposed to have been slept in by Marguerite de Valois in the Château de Tours. Gérard had fallen in love with an actress—Jenny Colon—and he hoped she would be Marguerite's successor. The room was adorned with old

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chests, gothic chairs and choir stalls and a Prie-Dieu, but in spite of these interesting objects, Mlle. Colon continued absent. Gérard dreamed of her, and his dreams upset what little reason he had. He wrote of her, called her by strange names, and she haunted his imagination in the mystic and ghostly semblances of a star or a saint or a goddess or a madonna.

"I cannot help writing you since I cannot forget you," runs one of the letters he published in *Le Rêve et la Vie*, "and though your occupations are so absorbing, perhaps you are not utterly indifferent to me. Your reasoning is doubly cruel, however, for you reason so well. Your art is part of the magic which so charms me. Pursue your path of glory! But if ever you need an arm to lean on, think of me."

Gautier had seen Jenny Colon, thought her beautiful, but could find out very little about her, for Gérard seldom spoke of her. He saw that his friend's infatuation, his growing poverty, and his habit of wandering all night in the streets or sleeping in the parks or in cafés, were steadily decreasing the number of his lucid moments. He was willing to lend him the small sums (never more than twenty francs) which Gérard asked for and spent very slowly, and one day he heard that the poor fellow had been sent to an insane asylum for having led a lobster by a string in front of the Palais-Royal. "Why is a pet lobster any more absurd than a cat, dog, gazelle, lion or any other creature?" protested Gérard. "Lobsters are quiet and serious; they neither bark nor bite, and they know the deepest secrets of the sea."

In *Le Rêve et la Vie* are many accounts of his increas-

ingly strange experiences. In the midst of dark hallucinations "a bright light shone upon my hell; surrounded by dimly-seen monsters with which I had been struggling, my way was suddenly clear, and celestial visions blessed my eyes." One night he thought the world was coming to an end, for he said he had seen a black sun and several moons. "One enters another land in the realm of dreams. I have never been able to penetrate the invisible world, through the ivory portals which separate us from it, without trembling. The first moments of sleep are like an image of death. A strange power numbs our thought, and we cannot determine the exact moment at which we come into the place of the shadows of a dream. Gradually our eyes accustom themselves to the dim light, and we see the weird figures which inhabit the limbo. They become more distinct, they move about, and the spectre-world opens before us."

At times when he could think clearly, he knew the failure he had made of his life, and though his friends were kind to him, he knew they knew it too, and so his most sane moments were his saddest. One day he showed Gautier a cord which he had bought as a valuable relic, supposed to have been worn as a belt by Mme. de Maintenon at Saint-Cyr. He went to a café to finish the last chapters of *Le Rêve et la Vie*. There was a fight in the café, and he was taken to a police station, though he had had no part in the quarrel. Finally released (it was a cold night in January, 1855) he wandered aimlessly; forty-eight hours later he was found hanging by Mme. de Maintenon's belt from an iron railing near a miserable old hotel in the dirty, crooked rue de la Vieille Lanterne. He had some-

how stumbled on the place before dawn, no one had answered his knock, and his next thought was to hang himself. A gendarme had been summoned; Gérard might have been saved if the ignorant persons who first discovered him had not thought it bad luck to sever the cord of a man who had hung himself before the arrival of an officer. The exact spot of the old railing is now the stage of the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt. Gautier attended Gérard's funeral, his head and neck wrapped in a yellow shawl. He was suffering from an abscess in his throat.

## CHAPTER VIII

### *The World of Balzac*

THE friendship of Gautier and Balzac began in 1835 when the latter asked the author of *Mademoiselle de Maupin* to write for the "Chronique de Paris." "Balzac," said Gautier, "was an excellent fellow, not without pride, but having no vanity. He wore a white flannel dressing-gown which he took care to keep free from ink-spots, and which he regarded as an excellent uniform for a writer. His health was good, his general opinions were normal, he was not afflicted with the usual complaints of his literary contemporaries. He would rather have been praised for the beauty of his hands than for his novels"—like Napoleon, who cared so much for his small well-shaped feet. Napoleon's and Balzac's ambitions were similar, the one wishing to conquer a world, the other to create one.

Like Gautier, Balzac could be gay in a Rabelaisian fashion; and he was admired by his friend for his fine physique and his remarkable memory. He advised him to work at night, and to live a chaste life, but Gautier found he got too sleepy for the former, and did not believe in the efficiency or necessity of a rigid observance of the latter rule. Balzac, like Hugo and Dumas, did not enjoy smoking. He told Gautier that affairs with women were not good for a writer. Though he saw no harm in an occasional meal of excellent quality and large quantity, his general theory and practise were based on excessive self-

restraint. He could drink four bottles of wine without the least sign of having drunk too much.

"Balzac steamed like a sweating horse," said Gautier. In the mornings, after a night of hard work, there was a mist about him like that which rises from a horse in cold weather. He frequently wrote during sixteen or eighteen hours out of twenty-four. Sometimes, after a particularly exhausting night, Balzac would call on Gautier and talk for a while on the stimulus of the coffee with which he had kept himself awake. Then he would lie down, charging his host to let him sleep only a short time. Gautier would let him have his sleep out, and Balzac, in dismay, late in the afternoon, would cry: "Ah! what pages I might have written! What a dreadful loss of time!" and hurry back to his room. Now and then he allowed himself the luxury of a walk in the Jardin des Plantes or in Père Lachaise, where, as Gautier says, "he dominated Paris, from the height of the cemetery, like Rastignac at the funeral of Père Goriot." Early in the morning, Méry, after a night of gambling, met Balzac wandering about the streets, and they talked till the sun rose at five. Claudin, in his book on Méry, says this occurred several times in 1847, when Balzac was troubled with debts and feared the police after sunrise, so his interesting discussions with Méry (who, according to Balzac, understood the characters in his novels better than anyone else) had to be interrupted.

Balzac had a great admiration for Gautier's style, and discussed the subject with him, wondering how he managed to write so beautifully without correcting his manuscripts again and again, as he must needs struggle with his own, yet never achieving a perfection that satisfied him. "The del-



icately sympathetic Gautier," says Brandes, "ever ready to admire, was the only author to greet Balzac with prompt recognition," and he did what he could to help him in some of the puzzling questions of authorship. Both Saintsbury and Brandes assert that Balzac profited by this friendly assistance, and in 1839, in describing Béatrix, he has been said to have employed, almost word for word, passages from articles written two years previously by Gautier in reference to Jenny Colon and Mlle. Georges:

GAUTIER

BALZAC

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|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>"<i>Les cheveux . . . scintillent et se contournent au faux jour en manière de filigranes d'or bruni. . . . Elle ressemble à une . . . Isis des bas-reliefs éginétiques. . . .</i>"</p> | <p>"<i>Cette chevelure au lieu d'avoir une couleur indécise, scintillait au jour comme des filigranes d'or bruni . . . ce visage ressemble à celui de quelque belle Isis des bas-reliefs éginétiques.</i>"</p> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Balzac once said to Gautier: "How many verses could you write for me per day?" Gautier wrote the poem called the *Tulip* for Balzac's *Distinguished Gentleman of the Provinces in Paris*, and other poems were the work of Mme. de Girardin, Charles de Bernard, Lasailly and others. Balzac could not write poetry with any distinction; the much-debated line with which Louis Lambert begins the *Epic of the Incas*:—

"O Inca! O roi infortuné et malheureux!"

is an example. However, there is no just charge of plagiarism in Balzac's use of the work of others, since he

asked for it and was given permission. He thought it would be a good joke to write a play in the following manner: Gautier was to do the first act, Balzac the fifth, and the rest was to be filled in by other writers. When Gautier asked what the subject, what the characters of the play were, in general, at least, to be, Balzac, as if in great disdain, and as if he had been insulted, haughtily replied: "If I stop to tell you the story, we will never finish the play." The idea in Balzac's mind was for his drama of *Vautrin*, which, of course, he eventually wrote himself.

There was a restaurant called "Le Cheval Rouge" at which Balzac and Gautier were in the habit of dining, and here Balzac had one of his numerous unsuccessful schemes for making money and fame. "The Society of the Red Horse" was founded; Balzac the Grand Master of the Order, Gautier an amused charter-member. Various persons were admitted, and all planned to get themselves into the Académie Française, to become rich, to be political leaders. Balzac's imagination enabled him to feel the soft cushions of high office under him before the association had been more than talked about. It fell through almost as soon as it is possible for a mere idea to fall.

Disappointment played so large a part even in a life of such achievement as Balzac's. No matter how many thousand things he did, there were millions he still wished to do. At first it was sleep that kept him from a few hours of writing. Then it was death. "Can I live six months longer?" he asked his doctor, and the reply was that he could hardly live six hours. This was a death-blow. It cut him off, says Houssaye, by the very thought of his

vast projects, the impossibility of further effort. He might have lived for months, had he not been told.

To Baudelaire, Balzac's greatest genius lay in his visionary power; he was surprised that the great novelist should be regarded primarily as an observer of realistic aspects of life. The truth, more clearly, is that Balzac was exuberantly both; his enormous vitality and response to life, the sweep of his understanding, give to his pictures, even those most realistic in intention, a heightened color, an intensity which is interpretive. His statues are larger than life; his world is built on a colossal, heroic scale, and whatever his defects of style, of delicate nuance in certain instances, his genius is of the first order, his power is superlative. He has been misjudged in a manner as Zola has been, though these novelists are so unlike in most of the elements of method and quality. Both have been accused of realism first and last, and the broad tide of a strange, vast river of the symbolic medium in which all the realistic elements float, has been often left out of an account of those bits and blocks which move with the stream in crowded yet somehow ordered masses.

## CHAPTER IX

### *The Purgatory of Baudelaire*

"THE first time I met Baudelaire," wrote Gautier, in his preface to *Les Fleurs du Mal*, "was in 1849, at the Hôtel Pimodan where we had rooms near those of Ferdinand Boissard. Mine was a fantastic one that communicated with his by a staircase hidden in the wall." The Hôtel Pimodan still exists on the Quai d'Anjou, Île Saint-Louis. It is a handsome building, occupied, more than a hundred years before Gautier lived there, by Lauzun, and belonging for a time to the French Government. A French family lives there now.

Boissard was an accomplished dilettante, and a painter of some talent. Before Baudelaire had any general recognition he met, through Boissard, many well-known artists whom it proved, later, useful to him to know. Boissard's rooms were elaborately furnished, and he owned a piano for which he had paid twelve hundred francs (now regarded as much more valuable, and owned by the State) on account of the paintings with which Watteau had adorned it. The smaller rooms of Baudelaire, with high ceilings and windows opening on the Seine, were finished in glazed paper, with huge red and black flowers. There were heavy damask hangings and a series of lithographs of *Hamlet*, by Delacroix; heavy pieces of furniture, a huge eighteenth-century table used as a desk; only about thirty books, all hidden away, Latin and old French poets in fine editions. Baude-

laire was fond of buying and selling furniture, so that he frequently seemed to be moving in or out of his lodgings.

At the Hôtel Pimodan the student-hilarity of the Impasse du Doyenné would have been regarded as cheap and childish, and the favourite amusement was less noisy and more dangerous. The "Club des Haschichiens" met once a month. Gautier and Baudelaire were rarely present, and they were usually spectators when they did not attend the "mystic" rites of this secret society, modelled on an Oriental order, commanded by a high functionary or Sheik called the Vieux de la Montagne, or Prince of Assassins. His word was law, and he was supposed to maintain his power by the use of a magic drug compounded of hashish and other narcotic ingredients. The members of the "Club des Haschichiens" partook of a patty which was expected to lessen their chances of going to heaven; it made water taste like delicious wine, meat like berries, and berries like meat; it resulted in ecstatic conditions of pleasure and in hallucinations of bewildering and strange delight. These orgies, however, were usually over by eleven, and everyone went quietly to bed. Balzac came one night but would eat no hashish. Gautier thought it would have taken a large dose to affect Balzac at all, and that his chief reason for not indulging was his fear of losing, even for a moment, his will-power.

Baudelaire, at this time, was always elegantly dressed in dark suits, spotless and well-cut. He disliked the crudities and extravagance of the dress and manners of the extreme Romanticists, and he cultivated an aristocratic reserve. He approved of bizarre and colorful costumes for women, but not for men. He polished his nails as carefully as he wrote his poetry. His eyes were of the color of Spanish tobacco;



he had fine white teeth; his head was like Laurence Sterne's; his chin had the strength of Balzac's; his lips were sensuous; his expression was ironical. He was a graceful, gracious and charming host. He had the gift of making his guests talk with a greater fluency and brilliance than usual, and in all circumstances the same serenity and ease of manner characterized his self-possession. His gestures were slow, expressive and few. In the simplest, most natural and perfectly detached manner he could pronounce the most monstrous proposition and support it with almost mathematically exact arguments, but in his theories of art he was fundamentally reasonable and moderate, and never joined the extreme Romanticists in condemnation of the traditional as such. He had the eighteenth-century art of being insolent in a polite manner, and the audacity of his expressed opinions caused him to be accused of vices which he never practised. He habitually told persons whom he did not like that he approved of all the things of which they disapproved, in the hope (which was usually fulfilled) that they would dislike and denounce him. He wished to be liked and understood only by those whom he liked. He appealed to men by the boldness and unconventionality of his thought, and to women by an appearance of respect for them and by a wit which clever women understood; and he enjoyed nothing more than to discuss art, literature and love with men and women who appreciated him.

He was born in 1821. His father had been a friend of Condorcet and had died when Baudelaire was young, leaving him well off—a condition which the poet's extravagance soon exchanged for poverty. His mother's second husband, General Aupick, at one time ambassador to Constantinople,





CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

*Photograph by Nadar*



antagonized his stepson, and Baudelaire saw very little of his mother, whom he loved, until after the General died. As a scholar Baudelaire was a failure, and his early literary efforts were not encouraging to his family, for he worked slowly and published nothing for a long time, such was the ideal of writing toward which he strove. He spent hours in the selection of one word; he had a natural instinct for form and style, but he could not satisfy himself with anything less than what he regarded as thoroughly admirable.

"Evil seemed to Baudelaire ridiculous, bourgeois and awkward," said Gautier, "and he hated it as a deviation from mathematical perfection." He was fascinated by unclean subjects, but he did not love them, and he wrote as one awed and haunted by the terrible power of evil. His extremely sensitive, nervous, high-strung, idealistic nature suffered tortures by the frequent wounds which he caused his conscience to suffer, and he expected to be punished in the next world for the sins he committed on earth. His God was a god of vengeance, and though he feared to do wrong, he had a perverse and fatal weakness for so doing, and he took a strange and gloomy interest in watching the adventures of his soul. His pride and reserve prevented him from wishing these things to be generally known, and when asked why he selected the subjects of his poems of darkest inspiration, he replied: "In order to shock stupid people."

The genius, the contradictory characteristics of Baudelaire are difficult to judge fairly, and some of his friendships are puzzling. It has been thought that Gautier could not have been congenial to so different a nature as Baudelaire's, though many of their tastes were similar. The ugliness of a slight wound in the neck made Baudelaire give

up the idea of killing himself; he and Gautier feared and hated death, commonplace and conventional ideas, bourgeois standards, respectable platitudes, and the prevailing tone of Parisian journalism. They loved a finished and beautiful form and style; they enjoyed the same sort of society. Gautier asserts that Baudelaire was polite, even deferential to him. According to Flottes, Gautier knew that in 1846 Baudelaire had referred to him as a "lazy stringer of words, banal," and generally uninteresting; and Levallois, who knew Baudelaire, thought he never really admired Gautier's work. André Gide, in his introduction to *Les Fleurs du Mal*, thinks Baudelaire's dedication of the volume to Gautier may simply be one of Baudelaire's most ingenious and elusive paradoxes:

*Au Poète Impeccable  
 Au Parfait Magicien ès Lettres Françaises  
 A mon Très Cher et Très Vénéré  
 Maître et Ami  
 Théophile Gautier  
 Avec les Sentiments  
 De la Plus Profonde Humilité  
 Je Dédie  
 Ces Fleurs Maladives.*

When the author of *Les Fleurs du Mal* was brought to trial, Gautier defended the poet; but so did Hugo, whom Baudelaire detested, and Sainte-Beuve, whom he feared and disliked. Baudelaire said he was glad the prosecution had been brought against him. "Many people will read the book who would not otherwise have done so, in order to find things in it which I did not put there." His general

opinion, in regard to the vicissitudes of art, however, was that "Art is a duel in which the artist first cries out in his terror and then is beaten." Baudelaire called Sainte-Beuve "my vice," and treated him with a respect the greater part of which was certainly not a sincere conviction. Is this the key to his attitude toward Gautier? Did he feel that he needed the support of these men, and must appear to admire them and their writings?

The originality, the force, the imagination, in a word, the genius of Baudelaire is far greater than Gautier's, and there are many points of contrast in their natures. Mme. Sabatier threw Baudelaire into an ecstasy. He could only approach her with a sense of his unworthiness. To Gautier she was a beautiful woman to whom he wrote letters so indecent that they have never been published, and are not available to the public in the Bibliothèque Nationale. Baudelaire wrote her mystical and adoring poems. Gautier prided himself on his physical strength; Baudelaire had a succession of physical ailments. Gautier was even-tempered; Baudelaire was moody, and moodiness results in states of mind in which one's best friends bore one. Baudelaire's art is essentially subjective, Gautier's essentially objective. Yet Baudelaire wrote in 1862: "No one but Gautier understands me when I talk of painters and of painting." They appear to have been close friends, and, like all friends, they differed on various questions, and they sometimes misunderstood each other. Each admired the art of the other, and preferred his own.

There is an extraordinary flexibility in Gautier's literary sympathies, and his theory of art found points of agreement with those of Baudelaire, just as, in former years, he

had been able to praise the productions of Hugo. Gautier and Baudelaire thought that the current ideas of the "Progress of Humanity" were absurd. "Morals have not improved since the eighteenth century," said Baudelaire, "and when people seem to be less wicked, it is simply that there is a decrease in the energy with which they seek to do evil." The love affairs of Baudelaire and Musset were not of an eighteenth-century reasonableness, but these writers could agree in one respect at least—they felt that love in the nineteenth century was too tearful, too sentimental, involving too much fault-finding, and the bad taste of a propensity for quarreling. Baudelaire, like Mérimée and Stendhal, was more at home in the eighteenth-century world of ideas than in those of his own time. Baudelaire hated the Second Empire, not because it was an empire, but because it was such a poor one. The only kind of government, however, in which Baudelaire would have taken any interest, a government controlled by an aristocratic, artistic and philosophical hierarchy, based on the rights of the individual, is a type in which he would have wished to play no active part, but be allowed to do just as he pleased—and this, to be sure, he largely proceeded to do under the then-existing state of things in France.

Dissatisfaction increased with age. In 1862 Baudelaire wrote to his mother: "You would scarcely believe how woefully standards have been debased in the Paris of these days. It is no longer the charming and lovable place that I knew in other years. The artists and the writers know nothing, and it is held against me that I know more than they. Except for d'Aurévilly, Flaubert, Sainte-Beuve, no one understands me at all. Life has become horrible to me,



and I should like to fly from human faces, especially French ones." The tone of this letter is that of despair and not of vanity. He prayed that he might be granted strength to contemplate his heart and his body without a feeling of overpowering disgust. "O Lord, my God! Give me grace that I may write beautiful verses which shall prove to me that I am not the meanest of men, and that I am not still worse than those whom I despise!" In 1866, about a year before his death, he was still more depressed, and he wrote again to his mother: "Except Chateaubriand, Balzac, Stendhal, Mérimée, Vigny, Gautier, Flaubert, Banville, Leconte de Lisle, the whole troupe of modern writers horrifies me; the members of the Academy, the liberals, virtue, vice, progress—all horrify me. Never talk to me of those who talk of nothing!" A note of deeper misery had been struck in 1862. "I have cultivated my nervous disorders with pleasure and terror. I seem now to be always in a state of dizziness, and to-day—January 23rd—I was conscious of a strange warning. I felt a wind driven by the wing of idiocy."

As early as 1857 he was a changed man. The Goncourts describe him "with his head shaved, his shirt open at the neck, like a victim ready for the scaffold. His nails were still carefully manicured, but his brain was in disorder; the tone of his voice was harsh and bitter, and he seemed, with sullen anger and fierce eloquence, to be attempting to excuse himself for having outraged common decency in his verses." His health grew steadily worse, and in 1867 he died of a complication of paralytic, pulmonary and venereal diseases; the most cruel symptom of all had been the loss of the power of speech.

Anecdotes of Baudelaire's peculiarities show him to have been as eccentric as the Borels and the Nanteuils of earlier days, though in a very different way, and with marked ironic intention. Judith Gautier reports that one day Baudelaire entered a chemist's, and in the most formal and gracious manner said to the chemist: "*Monsieur l'apothécaire, voulez-vous avoir l'obligéance de m'administrer un clystère?*" Walking with Banville, Baudelaire got him to go to the nearest bath-house, and ordered a room with two tubs. When they were comfortably installed, Baudelaire said: "Now you are defenceless, I shall read you a tragedy in five acts." Douglas Ainslee declares that Baudelaire, with his hair dyed green, was talking to Auguste Vacquerie. "Do you notice nothing unusual about me?" asked Baudelaire. "No," replied Vacquerie, "I see that your hair is green, but as almost everyone has adopted that color lately, I did not wish to congratulate you on being commonplace." Ainslee asserts that the poet was furious. Frequently Baudelaire called on Leconte de Lisle to discuss poetry with him. One day the Parnassian was out, and Mme. Leconte de Lisle left Baudelaire in the sitting-room to wait for him. When she returned, she could not find him, and when she went into the bedroom, she saw his feet sticking out from under the bed. He had been trying to catch the family cat. He was particularly fond of cats, and several of his poems are addressed to them. Asselineau relates that Baudelaire had a habit of suddenly wishing to dine with him at three o'clock, just after the former had finished lunch. Sometimes they talked from noon till midnight, and Asselineau asserts that Baudelaire was the only man he ever met with whom he was never bored. Baude-

laire was fond of saying that he loved singing and enjoyed a symphony concert, but that his favourite music was the noise made on a window-pane by the claws of a cat attached by its tail to the upper sash; that his favourite food was the brain of a baby; that ugly persons should not be allowed to love. It is of course unnecessary to take these anecdotes too seriously.

In Baudelaire's life there seem to have been two principal love affairs. Jeanne Duval was a negress, and Mme. Sabatier had a literary salon. "The only woman Baudelaire ever really loved," says Huneker, "was Mme. Sabatier. His poem *à la très chère, à la très belle* is addressed to her. Jeanne Duval fascinated him, but he never really loved her."

It was rather that he loved her in a different way. "I was the only one of her friends whom she could endure," he remarks. "She was a mulatto, not very black, not very beautiful, rather flat-breasted, rather tall; her hair was not very curly; she had an awkward walk." According to Reynold, she had neither heart, nor beauty, nor wit. Baudelaire met her one night in 1840 at a little theatre where she acted. Banville thought there was something savagely queenly, something divinely beastly about her: and Feli Gautier's opinion is that Baudelaire's love for her was "morbid, brutally sensual, a matter of curiosity and of imaginative plasticity. Though she thought he loved her, she never for a moment had the slightest effect upon his heart. He loved her because in his fancy she represented the primitive beauty of strange lands of which he dreamed." He fitted out a room in oriental luxury which he deemed a suitable setting for Jeanne and her lover. He quarrelled with her—no one

could be expected not to—and he gave her what he could while she continued to demand more. She was given to deceit, robbery and drunkenness, but he continued to provide for her, to sell some of his choicest possessions for her benefit, and to care for her when she fell ill, when he had tired of her, and when, in 1852, he loved only Mme. Sabatier. Thanks to him, Jeanne Duval outlived the man she had never understood. It is much more to be doubted that she loved him than that he loved her, however strangely and imperfectly and unfortunately.

In contrast to his first love, his second was mystically sentimental—not she herself, but his idea of her. Baudelaire first met Mme. Sabatier at Boissard's, in the Hôtel Pimodan, in 1842. From that day she seemed to him an angel of goodness, but the period of his infatuation covered principally the years from 1852 to 1857. The Goncourts describe her as a *vivandière de faunes*. Her charm was a rare beauty and an appealing personality, and though she was neither artistic nor intellectual, she surrounded herself with persons such as Dumas, Gautier, Meissonier, Musset, Flaubert, Bouilhet, Maxime Du Camp and the Goncourts. She and Gustave Doré would sing duets for which she played accompaniments, apparently amusing and enjoyable to the habitual guests who filled her salon. Without knowing much about art, she could enjoy discussions without which her friends would not have been happy, and the atmosphere of her entertainments was that of informality and gaiety. "Come what may," wrote Baudelaire, "I am inclined to be fatalistic, and I know well that I have a horror of passion; I know all the shame, the disgrace which it brings." He wrote that he feared that he would be jealous, that her

soul was beautiful, but, after all, it was the soul of a woman. He feared she would not love him if she knew the depths of his nature. Some of Baudelaire's friends were jealous of the favour shown him by Mme. Sabatier. Not Gautier, for he never loved her; he flirted with her, nicknamed her "*La Présidente*," by which title she was generally known. When, years afterwards, Baudelaire returned from Brussels, very ill and scarcely able to talk, Mme. Sabatier came to see him every day, and devoted herself to him till his death.

One day Baudelaire was listening to a group of persons expressing contempt for an ugly old idol which someone had dug up. "Beware," said Baudelaire, "it might be the true God." In other words, Baudelaire was profoundly sceptical; he had the scepticism of scepticism, which lies at the root of the greatness of Anatole France, and like almost all profound sceptics, his cynicism was chiefly a form of wit, and not a quality of deepest conviction in his thought. "He was detestable as a man, but divine as a poet," said Anatole France. The truth concerning him is more clearly stated by Leconte de Lisle: "The fact that Baudelaire expressed his love of beauty in masterly form makes his faults pardonable." His was a great soul in torment, with the power to describe his sufferings. Such critics as Scherer and Brunetière completely misunderstood both the man and the poet. "He was grotesquely impotent; he had no talent," said Brunetière.

Gautier never made a better criticism than the remark that Baudelaire was a critic of impeccable taste. His views were broader than Gautier's; he understood the poetry of Racine, and at the same time he could appreciate



at once the genius of Whistler and that of Wagner. "He created modern art-criticism," says André Gide, and he is thus, in relation to modern art, in a position similar to that of Diderot to the art which was just beginning at the end of the eighteenth century. Reynold finds in Baudelaire a modern Dante and much that is comparable to the work of Villon, "the only great poet of the fifteenth century, a poet who expressed a scorn of his time such as Baudelaire felt for his. They are both Catholic and 'modern,' and death is not, in their minds, a matter of annihilation."

In an article written in 1924, Valéry asserts that Baudelaire's influence is stronger now than ever. His is the first great figure that stands for much that is most typical of the modern artistic attitude; and Verlaine, Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Laforgue and later writers are clearly indebted to him. "Modern art," said Baudelaire, "is the creation of a suggestive magic, including the various mingled elements of subject, object, the world external to the artist and the artist himself,"—a generalization of which the key is the "suggestive magic," the so-called "difficulty" of modern art which chiefly consists in the fact that there is more in it of this "created magic" and less of the element of representation in the traditional accepted sense.



## CHAPTER X

### *Journalism and Travel*

AT the time of the Revolution of February (1848), Gautier lived in the rue Lord-Byron, near the Étoile. It was not, according to Du Camp, a propitious time for writers who cared little for mixing in politics, for they were apt to be left in the lurch by the march of events. Just before the revolution, Gautier had comfortably established himself in the field of journalism, had made a name for himself as a writer, and his income enabled him to keep a carriage and two white ponies in which he took a keen delight. February, 1848, brought him bad luck, as did every other political upheaval of which he had any experience. He blamed it on the bourgeois whom he had attacked in 1830, and who, he was morally certain, had never forgiven him. Nevertheless he continued to write for the papers because, to his deep regret, his poems and novels were never a sufficient means of support. In 1850 he travelled in Italy, and his impressions are beautifully inscribed in the charming pages of *Italia*. On his return to Paris, he settled in the rue Rougemont, where his creditors promptly and persistently besieged him, but, as usual, he managed somehow to scrape along. In 1851 Flaubert decided to go to Paris and to ask Gautier's advice in connection with certain puzzling points about *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*. Bouilhet said that Flaubert was like Panurge asking questions of the Oracle. In Paris, Flaubert stayed in Du Camp's apart-

ment where, one evening, Gautier came for a literary conference. Flaubert expressed his views of the duties of an artist, and Gautier replied: "I know all that; it is the agony of a beginner, just as measles is something that children have to go through. When I lived in the rue du Doyenné with Arsène Houssaye, Camille Rogier and Gérard de Nerval, we had ideas such as yours. I know what it means to write masterpieces; everyone tries to write one; everyone thinks he is writing one, but it is only faith that saves the day. O Flaubert! your belief in the divinity of art, in the sacred calling of the poet, the mission of the writer, is naïve. The writer sells his work just as the merchant sells his goods, except that the merchant's prices are higher. Will you be able really to add to the small volume in which can be printed the poetry of France which is really worthy of the name? You do not know, and you cannot know in less than two hundred years. Publish your book at once, and get the most you can for it." Nevertheless, Du Camp asserts, Flaubert did lay *La Tentation* aside, and started to work, for the time being, on *Madame Bovary*. *La Tentation* was not published until 1874.

Gautier had expressed himself as he did to Flaubert because he was depressed, not because his literary convictions had undergone a change. His hatred of the exigencies of journalism was ever present to him, and he always felt as he did when he wrote in his preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin*: "If Louis-Philippe would once and for all suppress all newspapers, literary and political, I should be infinitely grateful to him, and I should address to him a beautifully dishevelled hymn in free verse with alternate rhymes." In this contempt for the press Balzac agreed

with Gautier. "Really," said the latter to the Goncourts, "I am ashamed of my calling. For a very moderate recompense, without which I should starve, I dare to say only about one-eighth of what I believe, and even so I am in constant danger of law-suits." He expressed dissatisfaction with his articles; they seemed to lack colour, try as he would to give life to them. He had quarrelled with Girardin but he had not dared to break with him, such was the power of the man whom Flaubert regarded as an example of how far impudence and stupidity could successfully be carried. "I should like," said Flaubert, "to pour hot lead into him, and to flay him alive." "Ah!" said Gautier to Maxime Du Camp, "if only I had an independent income of twelve hundred francs, I would leave all this. I would move over into the Latin Quarter, near the Luxembourg, and live the life of the students, write poems and sonnets, and never, never, never set foot in a theatre. I am the beast tied to the stake of the daily review. O Max! Thrice-fortunate Max! You do not realize how lucky you are! Embrace poor Theo!" *le pauvre Théo*, as his friends called him. He had gone to the theatre night after night, month after month, always with the necessity of writing an account of some tiresome show or other, and had only very seldom seen an interesting piece of acting.

Napoleon III did much to suppress the press, but by no means as Gautier had wished Louis-Philippe would do. The Emperor made it more and more impossible to express an honest opinion. The decree of February 17, 1852, had aimed at the source of political discussion, and had hit the mark. At least one periodical bravely continued to speak freely and to utter no words calculated to sooth the

Emperor's ears. Even this brave pamphlet, however, had to seek safety in Belgium from which the spot-light of "La Lanterne" continued to play upon Paris. The wit of Henri de Rochefort was not to be blunted, and "La Lanterne's" "outrageous" criticisms of the Imperial pair were matters of conscientious objection to the deplorable manner in which the fortunes of France were being flung to the winds. Early in 1869 it was known that Napoleon III had made efforts to enlist the support of England which his fatal misjudgment had alienated ten years previously, and the result of his manœuvres was thus described in "La Lanterne": The Empress asks her maid if she is sufficiently décolletée to receive the Queen of England. "Madame," is the reply, "I don't see how you could be more so." The Queen puts off her arrival for a number of reasons. She cannot appear in time for luncheon because she has forgotten to mourn for her dear Prince Consort. She cannot arrive later, for the doctor has ordered her a complete rest in Switzerland. The final tableau is the fainting Empress after the receipt of the desperate information that the Queen has been seen leaping from crag to crag among the High Alps.

This brilliant kind of nonsense did much to reduce the Empire to its pitiful condition of isolation at the outbreak of the War of 1870.

In his description of foreign countries Gautier gives endless details of costume and of architecture, but the characteristics of the different national types, the people themselves are frequently neglected. Apropos of Gautier's *Tra los Montes* Mme. de Girardin said to him: "Are there, then, no Spaniards in Spain?" One night in Paris, Gautier

unexpectedly arrived at a dinner dressed in Russian boots and furs. It was like him to be more concerned with the acquisition of colourful foreign garments than a knowledge of the people who habitually wore them. Gautier remembered a remark made to him by Thackeray when he asked him if he had ever been in Spain. "I know Spain very well. I once spent half an hour in Cadiz." This had seemed to be a joke, but Gautier recognized the truth of it, for he thought the practised eye could gain an unforgettable picture of a country in a very short time.

At any rate, whether Gautier described too much or not, there are those for whom his descriptions constitute the most charming portions of his writings, and the accounts of what he saw in Spain, Italy and Russia are delightful in their vividness, colour and freshness. His special gift is shown in a paragraph in his novel *Partie Carrée* in which he studies the face of the dead Napoleon at St. Helena, and it is an example of what Gautier could do in the descriptions other than those of colour and form.

"A strange expression of serenity, of deliverance, seemed to rest upon the pale marble mask in which the convulsions of the death agony had left no trace, nor were there signs of the exultation of past triumphs, nor the sorrows of failure, nor weariness of suffering and of thought. The corpse of a man had become the statue of a god. The touch of death had revealed the divine element in the earthly form; the dungeon had become a temple, and the funeral chamber an Olympus. The face of Christ on the cross, of Prometheus on the rock, could not have been nobler or more beautiful."



## CHAPTER XI

### *Gautier at Home*

"I DO not feel at all like the father of a family," said Gautier to the Goncourts, at the age of fifty-three. "I love my children, but not as if they were my own. I feel much younger than I am, and too young to be my children's father."

His daughter Judith has given a long and detailed account of the family life of the Gautiers in her memoirs. "Théophile's daughters have a special charm. There is a sort of oriental languour in their manner; their eyes are dark and move lazily, shaded by beautiful heavy lids. The girls inherited a rhythm and grace of motion from their father, who allowed them, as children, to roam about the house at will, like little pet dogs, and, at first, let their education take care of itself," said the Goncourts. Later on Gautier took an interest in their studies, but he did not care what they did, whether it were cooking or art, so long as they were busy at something. "His daughters," says Remy de Gourmont, "consoled him for everything," but when it came to the question of Judith's marriage, her father was not obliging. He had liked Catulle Mendes very much, but when he fell in love with Judith, Gautier said he did not want a Jew for a son-in-law, and though he was finally persuaded to give his consent, he could not be induced to go to the wedding. One of his unexpressed reasons for objecting seems to have been that Judith had been useful as a sort of secretary to him in his work, and he desired her further as-



sistance. Perhaps, also, he wished her at the same time to go on with her own writing, under his guidance. He had told the Goncourts that he regarded her mind as extraordinary, and had said of a novel she had written in 1868 that there was something of *Salammbô* in its atmosphere without the heaviness which, he felt, could not be denied as one of the qualities of Flaubert's great work. It is not a favour to Judith Gautier to compare her in any way to Flaubert. It is sufficient to note that her memoirs are affectionately and charmingly written.

Gautier's wife was Ernesta Grisi, a sister of Carlotta Grisi, and a first cousin of Julia (Giulia) Grisi of whom Gautier wrote that her beauty was matchless, and that he would have given all his rights as a French citizen in exchange for the opportunity of seeing her in the nude. "Such was her beauty," wrote Houssaye, "that although at the time she became famous people still talked of la Catalini, queen of the Florentine salons, and of Mlle. Sonntag, and of the 'divine Pasta,' who was called a daughter of the gods and accredited with every sort of feminine charm, Julia Grisi caused them all to be forgotten."

Ernesta Grisi was an actress in a troupe with Carlotta, and her professional duties occupied so much of her time that little Judith had to be entrusted to the care of a nurse. Now and then she was taken to see her family, who lived at that time in the rue de Rougemont. During her first remembered interview with her father, he had tried to make her smile, and had only succeeded in frightening her. Grandpa Gautier was also rather terrifying, but around his house there was a garden which Judith loved and in which she found compensation for the childish troubles involved in

living, as she did for a time, with Grandpa and two aunts. Grandpa was very proud indeed of Théophile, and told Judith that it was her duty to share this feeling. "We must be an honour to him—" and an early step in this direction seemed to be to learn some of his verses by heart. The two aunts found Grandpa a little hard to manage. He would never admit that he was ill because he expected to live, and insisted upon living, to be a hundred, like great-Grandpa. When little Judith saw her father, she would try to convince herself that he was as wonderful as Grandpa said he was, and to see why it was that everyone seemed to like him so much. She noticed that he always laughed with his head on one side, and that this always made his monocle slip from his eye. She observed that his face was rather white, his hair lustrous, and that he was well-dressed. He would always pick her up, kiss her, put her down again, and pay no further attention to her. The tall, thin Mephistopheles, with a head like an Arabian, was her godfather, Maxime Du Camp. The beautiful dancer who danced so beautifully, and for whom her father wrote the lovely ballets *Giselle* and *Le Peri*, was her godmother, Carlotta Grisi.

Naturally there was not much sympathy between Gautier's relatives and those of his wife. The conservative, respectable bourgeois has little in common with the life of the actor and dancer, and the Gautiers thought the Grisi a bad influence on Judith; the two Gautier aunts thoroughly disliked Ernesta, Carlotta and Julia. Surprisingly enough, however, it was Ernesta who insisted that Judith go to a convent school—and Théophile usually did what Ernesta wanted, though if he had known how uncongenial the life in such a place was to be in Judith's mind, he would

probably have done what he could to dissuade his wife. One day a nun came from the school to interview Judith's parents. After various inquiries Gautier issued an ultimatum: "I desire that my daughter be given a bath once a week." This seemed to the nun an exorbitant demand, but she saw she must give her word. Gautier was much distressed that Judith's uniform was a plain black one, and he expressed the characteristic opinion that children should be beautifully dressed. Judith's name made her unpopular in the convent; the writings of her father and the acting of her mother gave her anything but a saintly background. One of the nuns asked her if it were true that her father had two wives. "Why not," she assented, "since he is a Turk!" And, judging by some of the clothes he wore, he might indeed be taken for one. The monthly reports from the convent asserted that Judith was lacking in any sort of religion.

When her grandfather died Judith was permanently removed from the convent. Her mother, inconsistently enough, had planned a career of ballet-dancer for her piously educated daughter, but Théophile put his foot down, and though he allowed Judith and her sister Estelle to practise dancing for the sake of the exercise, he determined that their lives should be spent neither in nunneries nor on the stage. He invented strange pet-names for them. Judith was "Ouragean" and Estelle was "Monstre-vert." He had now moved to a bigger place, in the rue de la Grange-Batelière. He was glad to have his daughters with him, and determined they should regard him as the best of friends. At first Judith's manner was slightly formal to the distinguished gentleman who wrote stories and fables,

and Gautier was delighted to find that she could recite some of his poems. His good-nature surprised her; she had had an idea that her father would always be rather formidable, but he had softened in response to her beauty and to the fact that she had arrived at a more interesting age. He read to her, urged her to read as much as possible, and introduced her to his friends who were frequent visitors and whom she found more entertaining than the gay and rather noisy persons whom she had met at her aunt Carlotta's during some of the school vacations she had spent there. Ernest Reyer, the composer, Nadar, the photographer, Maria Martinez, a negress prima-donna, called the black Malibran, to whom her parents had been kind; Meyerbeer, Banville, Flaubert and Paul de Saint-Victor—so devoted to her father and really a disciple of his theories of art—all these and many others she could remember with pleasure. Baudelaire, looking like a priest with his black suit and shaved head, and called Baldelarius by Gautier, thought Judith charming, and said she looked like a Greek girl.

From the first, Flaubert had been one of her favourites. He was a colossal figure in her eyes, broad-shouldered and wearing a moustache like a Gaul of ancient times. He would throw up his arms, stretch them back, lean forward as if to butt his adversary in the stomach with his head, and shout in a deep voice: "*C'est énorme!*" in the heat of argument. He loved to exaggerate grossly in conversation. She could remember him standing with his back to the fire, making broad gestures while he read *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* in his sonorous voice. When he had made a pause, he would be asked to act a drunken scene which was a terribly realistic and wonderful performance in little Ju-

dith's opinion. Sometimes she would listen in bed to proceedings downstairs from which she had been almost furious at being dragged away. The Goncourts describe Flaubert doing a dance called the "Idiot of the Salons," in a costume borrowed from Gautier, his collar off, his hair mussed, his whole person transformed into a grotesque and "formidable" caricature of a half-wit. Gautier would jump up, throw off his coat and, perspiring freely, "*son gros derrière écrasant ses jarrets*," dance in his turn, the "Pas du Créancier." Finally all present would join in a chorus of vociferous singing. The dignified artist, in this circle, became a clown or a buffoon with zest and whole-heartedness.

Judith asserts that Gautier detested living in the country, and was persuaded with difficulty to move even so far away from the centre of Paris as Neuilly—32 rue de Longchamp—where a charming little house and garden were available, and near which "le petit Dumas," as Dumas *fils* was called, had established himself. Baudelaire had a mysterious *pied-à-terre* in the same street, and Gautier was to find that his friends were as numerous and constant in their attendance on him in Neuilly as they had been in less distant quarters of Paris. Though he loved nothing better than literary discussions, he sometimes found them a little hard to manage at home, because of the lack of sympathy with which his wife regarded them. She, however, seems to have played a very minor rôle in the home of Théophile from this time on, and, in fact, she was away a great deal of the time. Her spouse liked to be approved of in all things. He said to Judith: "I feel oppressed and unhappy as soon as I encounter the least opposition, or when I hear the slightest tone of a jarring note, and it



always seems to me that any suggestion of bad humour is levelled directly at me. I must have the approval of all, even of the servants, even of the cat."

One day Baudelaire made an appearance with his coat all muddy. He had slipped in the street avoiding a dog that had barked at him. He could not rest until he had emerged from the kitchen as tidy as possible; and he had to admit that it had been his fault. His curiosity had prompted him to step on the dog's tail. Sometimes the Goncourts came to Neuilly, usually in the summer in an open carriage. The elegant Jules was the younger, with blond hair and dark eyes. Edmond's darker complexion, his rather square face and his attentive air, made him look, Judith thought, like a musketeer. Jules would at once start the conversation on some literary topic, and Edmond would fill in the pauses in the stream of Jules' remarks. They gave Gautier opportunity to express himself, and made every effort to draw him out. When they had gone, Gautier asked Judith what she thought of them. "They talk too hard," said she. "I see what you mean," replied her father. "They do not talk as I do for the pleasure of talking, but to get material. They always seem to be pumping me in order to take notes. This is rather upsetting. I feel that everything I say may be published." The Goncourts express a similar conviction in their diary to the effect that Sainte-Beuve was for ever sounding them with a like purpose.

The society of charming women always appealed to Gautier, but he seems to have had few love-affairs of any interest. Judith calls a Mme. Regina Lhomme one of the ladies for whose friendship he cared particularly; he overcame his dislike of letter-writing for her sake; consented





EDMOND AND JULES DE GONCOURT

*From a sketch by Gavarni*



to be the godfather of one of her children; often spent an evening at her house. He was invited to all sorts of entertainments, but usually preferred to stay at home, though he was often to be seen at the Princesse Mathilde's, at various other salons, and when he went to London with his daughters he made many friends. Judith speaks of the great Thackeray—a "colossal figure" (Judith uses this description frequently in her memoirs of her father's friends)—and of how gracious he was to Estelle and herself, the delightful remarks he made about their beauty, even about the way they did their hair. A visit to the Emperor at Compiègne was one of Gautier's pleasant recollections. In the course of the evening someone remarked (says Houssaye): "His Majesty is right, the times are changing; all those who hold a pen should devote themselves to the work of expounding the new ideas." Hereupon Gautier sententiously observed: "There are no such things as ideas. What are they? Paradoxes. Truth always walks in a maze of sentiments." "At least," said Napoleon III, "there are two ideas: that of good and that of evil." "Those two are also sentiments," replied Gautier. "Take for example," continued the Emperor, "hatred and love of humanity. According to you, there is no use in teaching people to think; one must teach them to love or to hate." Here the recorded conversation ended.

At his home there was no special room set aside for Gautier's study; sometimes he worked in one and sometimes in another, and he often walked all over the house, from attic to cellar, while he composed his poetry. Sometimes he went to sleep after dinner, and awoke about eleven, eager for talk. The Goncourts describe him at

dinner with his two daughters and son, eating crayfish with his sleeves rolled up, and making comic gestures. The most extraordinary dishes came in from the kitchen, and Gautier made remarks to the servants, teased them, joked about everything, like a Rabelais *chez lui*. He talked about his daughters and their Chinese teacher, and got them to show off their knowledge of the language. At one of his dinners there were twenty persons speaking forty languages, the Chinese teacher among them. In the midst of this Babel of tongues, Gautier kept up a rapid fire of facetiousness, telling the servants he would strangle them if anything went wrong. Some years later the Goncourts describe a dinner at which sat Gautier and his two old sisters, and the cat, Epouine, eating off the table like the others. The old sisters looked as if they had forgotten they were women. They were poorly dressed, their hair was very untidy, and they appeared to be devoted and self-effacing slaves of brother Théophile. After dinner, Gautier and the Goncourts climbed the garden wall, and sat astride it discussing literature far into the night. Gautier's humour was broad, but the charm of his manner carried him over the chasms into which a less attractive personality would have fallen. "If only I could have reached the heights attained by Hugo," he once remarked to the Goncourts. In later years he seemed chronically tired; he would doze off, suddenly rouse himself and talk of art and science with great animation, then sink into another drowsy spell.

In its best days, the life at Neuilly was thoroughly delightful. People came and went at all hours; some would come before tea and stay long after dinner. Gautier called himself both a *gourmet* and a *gourmand*, and he was often

to be seen cooking special dishes in which he took a jovial pride. On Thursdays the house was particularly crowded; and Flaubert, often accompanied by Louis Bouilhet or Ernest Feydeau or Maxime Du Camp, usually called at other times, to avoid the larger gatherings. But they were present on special occasions. One night after everyone had gone to bed, there came a loud knock at the door. It was Dumas *père*, and everyone hurriedly dressed to receive him. Judith had never before seen the great Dumas (another colossal figure) and she talked to him while Gautier tried to find an old copy of the "Moniteur" of which Dumas had announced his immediate need. Dumas embraced the fair Judith and the fair Estelle, and told them naughty stories, and laughed loudly at his own jokes—"mon *chair père*," as his own son irreverently called him. He is reported to have said, upon being asked how he enjoyed a certain dinner-party: "I should have been greatly bored had I not been there myself." On another occasion a snobbish society lady said to him: "Where could you have learned so much about great ladies?" "Chez moi, Madame," replied the indomitable father of he knew not how many hundred illegitimate children. There were extraordinary giants in those days; the literary and other productivity of Dumas, the endless pages of Balzac, Hugo and Gautier, the more painful though less numerous writings of Flaubert are monuments of Herculean labour.

On August 31st, 1863, a birthday party was given for Gautier. Two of his plays were performed—*Le Tricorne Enchanté* and *Pierrot Posthume*, the cast including Gautier and his son and daughters. Elaborate scenery was specially painted for the great occasion, at his own request, by



Puvis de Chavannes, who felt so nervous as to the result of his efforts that when the curtain rose he fled. Théodore de Banville wrote poems that were recited, and the Goncourts describe the evening as amusing. When Gautier forgot one of his lines he invented another, somewhat to the confusion of his cohorts who were waiting for their cues. His costume was of course extraordinary; an amazing pair of trousers and a general overspreading of colour, which, upon his face, reached a climax of various vividness calculated to frighten all diseases, for the novelist was masquerading as a doctor. All the well-known writers of Paris were present, and the house could hold no more.

Informality reigned at other parties; there were games of all sorts, and everybody was expected to do a trick or so. There were moments of excitement when Gautier would attempt to play the piano, and Gustave Doré would enter the room on his hands waving his feet in the air, and proceed to perform an amazing number of clownish feats at which he was, says Judith, inordinately clever.

There were quiet evenings when Gautier loved to read aloud to Judith, often passages from his own works, and afterwards to discuss them with her. Judith gave him the details for the ceremony of taking the veil in *Spirite*. When he had finished a chapter of *Le Capitaine Fracasse*, which was appearing serially, he wanted her opinion, and one day he rushed into the house calling out: "Everybody on deck!"—he had been asked by the publisher, Charpentier, to tell in advance how *Le Capitaine* was to end, and Gautier had informed him that his plan had been for Fracasse to return sadly to Château de la Misère after having killed Vallombreuse in a duel, and having lost Isabelle.

Charpentier had insisted that the book must be a best-seller, which it could not be without a happy ending. There was a long family discussion. Mme. Gautier's arguments were on Charpentier's side. Judith and Estelle thought Gautier's original plan was the right one, and they advised him to do as he saw fit. Gautier felt he ought not to make his publisher lose money and, after thinking it over for several days, decided on the happy ending—the marriage of Fracasse and Isabelle. He was distressed about it, but consoled himself as best he could with the thought that the book would be so well-written that the dénouement would not matter. In fact, the close of the book, as it stands, is quaint and charming, and, in a way, it suits the type of story quite as well as the other. There is nothing in the development of character, throughout, which makes a felicitous outcome incongruous. Fracasse, Baron de Sigognac, goes out in the garden of his château to dig a grave for his cat, Béelzébuth, and in so doing he unearths a coffer full of treasure which one of his ancestors had buried for safe-keeping when he went to the Crusades, in which he was killed. No one knew what he had done with the family fortunes, and had not the old cat died Fracasse and his bride, Isabelle, would never have managed to turn the Château de la Misère into the Château de Bonheur.

The events narrated in the novel are not historical. Gautier intended simply to give the atmosphere, the colour of the time of Louis XIII, somewhat along the lines of *Scaron's Roman Comique*, and, like that novel, by means of an account of a company of strolling players. The description of the Château de la Misère, at the opening of the book, is one of Gautier's masterpieces, and though Maxime Du

Camp asserts that no book was ever more impersonal than *Le Capitaine Fracasse*, Ernest Feydeau says, in his essay on Gautier, that the description of the château was an exact, though figurative, account of Gautier's state of mind when he wrote it. "I am sad because I live," said Gautier when Feydeau asked him why he should have been so depressed at that time.

While he was writing *Le Roman de la Momie*, Judith, as a child, held, one by one, the many necessary books of reference for him, and looked up marked pages for his use. She considered herself amply rewarded by being allowed to read the book when Gautier had finished it, and she enjoyed what Anatole France called its "incomparable prologue," which is one-fifth of the book, an elaborate account of the opening of the tomb, the beauty of the preserved body with which is discovered the papyrus giving the story of the life of the mummy, which constitutes the main part of the novel. Gautier liked to use rare and difficult words in his writings, such as *pschent* and *Calasiris*, which are not to be found in most French dictionaries; and it amused him to hear that some of his readers, who did not care to look them up, had been confused by them. He thought there was a special beauty of sound in words such as *goutelettes grésillantes*; and in *Une Nuit de Cléopâtra* he used the names Phrehiphephour, and Meïamoun, fils de Mandousch-hopsch, and the expression *stryges stymphalides*. One discovers a similar tendency in certain poems of Leconte de Lisle. There is one called *L'Apothéose de Mouça-al Kebyr*, and a line "*Mouca-ben-Nocayr, l'Ouali du Maghreb*"; and in the poems of Heredia, "*Thalestris, Bradamante, Aude et Penthésilée*" and "*Alonzo, Fernandez de Puerta Carero*."

There is a beautiful richness of sound and effect of strikingly contrasted colour which it is difficult to produce by means of more familiar words and names, and it is not surprising that Gautier hunted for such interesting specimens in all sorts of old dictionaries and other rare volumes.

The hospitality and the congenial society which was to be found at 32 rue de Longchamp continued until the days of the War of 1870, though Gautier was growing old and he had not the same energy and enthusiasm with which in earlier years he had established his group of friends, the succession of pleasant days. The last months of the Second Empire were depressing even to those who cared nothing for political adventure, either in talk or in action, and it was not only that Gautier and his friends were growing old; there was a change in the atmosphere of Parisian life, and the beginnings of national disaster cast a gloom over the most congenial gatherings.

The days of the Neuilly had been happy, at times brilliant, generally interesting, and though Gautier always thought of the time when he lived in the Impasse du Doyenné as the happiest of his life, he could look back with deeper satisfaction and with greater pride to the life at Neuilly, to which the literary memoirs of the time are full of reference.

## CHAPTER XII

### *The Faith of Flaubert*

IT is interesting to note the writers, greater than Gautier, who had a high opinion of his merits and even went to him for advice and help. Balzac, Baudelaire and Flaubert, especially the first and the last, considered Gautier a writer to whom they could look for literary guidance. Of course Gautier was older than they, and his position in the world of art was assured at the time of their debuts, but the Goncourts actually regarded Gautier as greater than Flaubert, and they refer disparagingly to "the little Houssaye" who thought Gautier's glory was to decline while that of Flaubert was on the increase and destined to have a permanency of splendid recognition.

It is not in the least surprising that Gautier and Flaubert were excellent friends. They agreed on a variety of topics with the loudest and most sonorous emphasis, with a frenzy of enthusiasm. They were at one as to the essentials of art as they felt and understood and loved them, and though Gautier had incomparably the lighter touch and of course the felicity of easy composition, what did it matter that Flaubert's agonies of endless correction and re-writing bore richer and more wondrous fruit? "Gautier knows how to live!" said Flaubert, with perhaps the realization that he did not, or at least that he could not, somehow, allow himself generally to do so.

It comes out so often in their many discussions that the



point to note about Flaubert is the vast difference between the man and the artist. In 1856 Flaubert lived for a time at 42 Boulevard du Temple while attending to the publication of *Madame Bovary*, and where Gautier, Jules Sandeau, Sainte-Beuve and others met for delightful talk and the exchange of congenial personal reaction. "One can absolutely despise men in general," said Ferrère, apropos of Flaubert, "and love certain men profoundly. It was the artist, not the man, in Flaubert, who was the arrogant soul." On the other hand, according to Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, "Flaubert had no sentiment; if he had had that, he would have had everything"; and Remy de Gourmont said: "Flaubert is the sovereign and imperious artist who lacks, fundamentally, the power to love."

Ferrère approached more nearly to the truth, and so does Havelock Ellis: "No writer can be more personal than Flaubert who made almost a Gospel of Impersonality." And there are passages in Flaubert's letters which reveal a consciousness of the problem. "I am convinced that the best things are the very ones which I underemphasize in my work. One cannot give certain effects without the suppression of exuberance, and that is what charms me—exuberance."

The qualities of exuberance and of sentiment, however, are nevertheless present in the writings of Flaubert when one penetrates beneath the manner and the unruffled surface and texture of the finished product; not equally in all cases, but especially in certain ones. There are novels of Zola—*Nana*, for example—which do not lead one to expect the really exquisite love-story in *La Fortune des Rougon*, in which the author succeeds in doing the very thing which he

has been declared incapable of doing simply because he failed to do it in *Le Rêve*. And there is a play of Flaubert's—*Le Château des Cœurs*—which, though not one of his greatest works, has a tenderness and a sentiment which many readers of *L'Éducation Sentimentale* would not dream of finding in any work of the same man. There is a kind of extreme sensitiveness, a sympathy for the suffering of others, that results in a method of portrayal superficially hard and relentless, whereas a much less tender feeling and a much less profound understanding may spread a coating of tears and sighs over a story, and thereby impress the casual reader as revealing a softer heart.

There is another way in which Flaubert has often been misjudged. He has been called a realist—a realist in all ways. In this case, how could the author of *L'Éducation Sentimentale* (in which there is, to the careful student, much besides a cold and materialistic method of presentation) have written *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, a poem of epic grandeur? Flaubert's opinion was that an author must stay behind the scenes, must not come forth and tell the audience what he thinks of this or that character. None the less we see him in the wings, we catch an expression, a gesture, we know what his judgment is, though it is necessary to watch for our chance and to know his method of conveying his personal reaction.

"There are two men in me," said Flaubert to the Goncourts, "one who is narrow-chested and sedentary, a man who bends constantly over his writing-table. The other is fond of violent exercise; he has the good-natured gaiety of the commercial traveller"; and he pursues the same thought in one of his letters: "One man in me is burning

for lyricism, for eagle-flights, for all phraseological sonorousness, for all the inspiration of highest thought; the other digs and delves for facts, tries to trace out tiny truths as effectively as big ones, and to make his readers experience almost materially, as it were, the things of which he writes. He loves to laugh, and he can relish the animality of human nature. I attempted a fusion of these two tendencies of my mind in *L'Éducation Sentimentale*."

Yet we may question the success of this particular effort. The effect of the book is mainly that of the depressing futility of human endeavour. Not that *L'Éducation Sentimentale* lacks feeling, pity and tenderness, but that there is not a certain quality, very difficult to define, which would in no way have marred the principal idea, the fundamental point of the story. Flaubert clearly saw the real, the devastating emptiness of men's hopes and dreams and aims and plans as they so often work out. What he did not always sufficiently convey, directly in the path of realistic truthfulness, is a sense of the fact that people may have a very good time, may really heartily enjoy their depressingly commonplace actions, as seen from other points of view—actions undistinguished, vulgar, stupid, and in the long run utterly futile even in respect to the pitifully worthless ambitions which inspired them—actions of which the one redeeming virtue is perhaps the very fact that their futility was not realized, and the enjoyment of them thus made possible. It is not that Flaubert did not know this, but that somehow the definite colour of that knowledge has been washed from the canvas in the process of application of other tones, other high-lights and shadows. And, after all, this is a relatively minor point. The genius of

Flaubert is so great, the beauty of his tone, however sombre, is so rare and satisfying, that it does not essentially matter that he, like every other artist, made his choices, emphasized and dwelt, perhaps, too constantly upon, certain aspects of life.

As a friend, he was delightful and amusing, and the zest of life, its vital joyousness, has been noted again and again by those who knew him. "I can see him lifting his great arms and shaking his head with its long hair, the picture he offered of the romantic Celt," wrote Mme. Alphonse Daudet. "Ah! that man did not hold back his generous praise, his affectionate emotions! How he could laugh, how he loved his friends, and how loyal to them he invariably proved himself to be!"

Flaubert loved his mother devotedly, and he worried her by the desperate intensity of his labours, by his refusal to take any exercise, and by sitting sometimes half a day motionless in one spot while he racked his brain for the one word he needed. "There was only one dark sorrow in the relations between my mother and me," wrote Flaubert. She thought him cruel to his mistress Mme. Colet, an unfortunate woman who wearied Flaubert with her insistence, her inability to resign herself to Flaubert's having tired of her beyond endurance.

And there were days when Flaubert was difficult to get along with, moody and morose. At the time of Gautier's death—1872—the Goncourts describe Flaubert in one of his periods of depression, "so irritable, dictatorial and easily provoked by anything or nothing that I fear our poor friend is afflicted with some sort of nervous disease"; and they remember, at an earlier date, a literary argument

amounting to an encounter between Flaubert and Feydeau, "shouts and wavings of arms to show the excitement caused by trivial differences of opinion on the most technical superficialities of authorship. It seemed to us that we were listening to a battle of grammarians, and that the expression of an idea had assumed such vast, solemn and ridiculous proportions that the idea itself had shrunk into comparative insignificance." So many things tormented Flaubert; his struggles with his art and with himself were endless. In Louis Bertrand's *"Flaubert à Paris, ou La Mort Vivante"*, there is a sadly ironical picture of the man who half-unconsciously fought a trace of the kind, simple bourgeois in himself, for he so hated the bourgeois, as he defined the type, that sometimes his classification was, for the moment, too capacious; there was a tendency to admit others into the category than those who belonged there. "The bourgeois," he thought, "is one who thinks basely," and Flaubert, of course, had nothing of this special definition. But the vast gulf between the austere and uncompromising ideal of art and the indulgent, warm-hearted, boisterous relaxation to which he sometimes gave free rein, took on at times the nature of a conflict—a conflict by no means essential to or inherent in the presence in him of these extremes, but seemingly so, at times, to him, in moments of depression, discouragement and nervous tension. He said that Mme. Bovary was really himself, as Maupassant said of *Bel Ami*—their problems, at any rate, the struggle of personality at grips with life. And even the good fortune of the novel itself seemed to him bad. *Madame Bovary* had not been the success of which Flaubert had dreamed, for the public had chiefly, he felt, been interested in the dramatic story



itself, the *côté-vaudeville* of the book, not the qualities for which he had worked like a slave. The trial and persecution of the novel had been rank injustice and nonsense in the minds of all judicious persons, but when it began to be widely read, Flaubert saw that the things he cared most for in literature were of no concern to the crowd. Yet *Madame Bovary* was far more successful than his other works; he could never understand why *L'Éducation Sentimentale* should have been a popular failure. And in some of the examples of renowned authors of his time, Flaubert felt that a false note had been struck. "I do not think that the things that appeal most of all to Musset are works of art," he wrote. "His greatest interests are his own passions. He is more the poet than the artist, and more the man than the poet, and not very much is to be said of him as a man." Evidently Musset would not have understood Flaubert, but there was nothing new in that. To begin with, his father regarded literature as useless, and wanted Gustave to be a lawyer; his father, much-beloved old Dr. Flaubert, from whom Gustave drew the kind and indefatigable Dr. Larivière in *Madame Bovary*—an answer to the charge so often brought against that novel that none of the characters is agreeable.

Flaubert frequently discussed his efforts with Gautier, talked to him about *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, which he had originally intended to call *Memoirs of Two Woodlice*, and for which research had been endless—literally so, for the work of preparation had been so exhaustive that Flaubert died before he had finished the book.

Historical figures that might not have seemed likely to interest Flaubert were sometimes subjects of long disser-

tations. "Nothing is more absorbing to me than the psychology of the Marquis de Sade," said Flaubert to the Goncourts. "He is the last word in Catholicism, his is the spirit of the Inquisition, the spirit inspired by the sight of torture, the spirit of the Church of the Middle Ages, the spirit of perversion. In all the works of de Sade, Nature is abhorred; there is not a tree, not an animal in his books." From this subject Flaubert would jump to "enormous," pantagruelian and ironical attacks on those who attacked religion, and arguments on an imaginary document supposed to bear the inscription:

I DO NOT EXIST—[Signed] God

There was a lugubrious dinner at Flaubert's, March 2, 1872, at which Turgenev, "the gentle giant, the kind barbarian, with long white hair falling down over his eyes and his deeply wrinkled brow," said he hoped that the epitaph on his tomb might consist of an estimation of the good his books had done toward the emancipation of the Russian peasants. He said he felt the approach of death, and that it must be due to his no longer being able to love. "Nothing in life has ever meant anything to me in comparison with love." Gautier listened to him silently, seeming sad and old, and finally said: "I feel as if I were already dead. Nothing interests me."

In his youth, Flaubert wrote descriptive lyric poems, in the style of Hugo and Byron, but felt he would never accomplish anything along those lines; there was nothing original to be done in that field. And yet, according to Bourget, the most powerful influence ever exerted upon Flaubert was that of the days of the decline of Romanticism. "Of his older

friends the one he loved best, whom he saw most frequently, was Gautier," and this must largely have been, on the literary side, because of Gautier's high sense of a beautiful form and style. Flaubert says of his youthful days: "Our dreams were superbly extravagant . . . What a hatred we had for all platitude! How greatly and ardently our inspirations burned within us! How deeply we admired Hugo!"

How little the writings of Flaubert have in common with those of Hugo and of Chateaubriand! Yet the love of colour, of oriental splendour, was there for Flaubert's delight, and he loved to hear Chateaubriand's descriptions read, and he lingered over the prose-poetry, the richly-flowing musical phrases; though he cared little for the rhetorical, political, religious and religiously-sentimental aspects of Chateaubriand's genius. Flaubert, at heart, was always a Romanticist; but whereas the disillusion and sufferings of Chateaubriand and Byron took the form of the lyric lamentation, Flaubert's sorrows were expressed in sober meditation. The colour and the richness of Romanticism, however, are, in their way, no less frequently, no less gorgeously present in some of his pages than in those of the earlier school.

These words of Buffon express the æsthetic theories of Flaubert: "All the intellectual beauties that may be found in a beautiful style, all the harmonies of which it is composed are so many truths, as useful to, and should, perhaps, be still dearer to the public opinion than the matter, the ideas, thus set forth." To this Flaubert added: "When I write a novel, I have in mind a nuance, a coloration; in *Salammbô*

a purple background; in *Madame Bovary* the colour of mustiness"; somewhat as Whistler named his paintings according to a predominating tone, or as modern musicians call their compositions colour-symphonies.

Again he strikes the note of the aim which somehow always involved a conflict with the dual-personality complex: "Gladly would I give all the information I have gained from all the books I have read on Carthage to be, just for three seconds, deeply, really moved by the passion of the characters of *Salammbô*." The same note is struck in a reference to Flaubert by Conrad in writing to a friend who had compared him to the Frenchman: "When you overwhelm me with the mantle of Flaubert, it is an ominous garment to put on a man's shoulders. Yet there is one point in which I resemble the great man. It is in the desperate, heart-breaking toil and effort of writing, the days of wrestling as with a dumb devil for every line of my creation."

It was observed by Gautier that his own style was meant to be looked at (and that he was a man for whom the visible world existed), whereas he felt that Flaubert's style was intended to be read aloud. "His style is rich, robust, sonorous, of an originality for which he is indebted absolutely to no one. . . . *Salammbô* is neither a novel nor a history; it is an epic poem." And what a wealth of material he had amassed for his special use! "Flaubert may be assumed to be of Gautier's opinion in respecting the excellence of dictionaries as reading," says Saintsbury, "for his vocabulary is simply unlimited."

The final point to be dwelt upon, in a consideration of

Flaubert, is the really saintly character of his life. If Balzac is the type of the novelist-athlete, Flaubert is the example of the novelist-martyr. "Let us love each other in Art," wrote Flaubert, "as the mystics love each other in God."



## CHAPTER XIII

### *Parisian Hostesses*

THE fashionable salons of the eighteenth century were more formal, more uniform, more set about by rule and tradition than those of the Paris of the nineteenth century. There was a great deal of wit in the latter, but it was softened by sentiment; and there was a greater variety of types in the nineteenth-century salons than would have been appreciated by the leaders of the gatherings of the old régime. Rousseau and Diderot would perhaps have been happier had they lived in the later period; Mérimée and Stendhal would have found the former more congenial.

In Gautier's time, the leading salons were not all dominated by women of the highest social rank; equally interesting people were to be found at Mme. Païva's; at Mme. de Girardin's, at the Princesse Mathilde's, at Mme. Sabatier's and at Rachel's. There were other famous salons, but in these Gautier was more frequently present. Mme. Sabatier's has been referred to apropos of Baudelaire, and Rachel's is to be mentioned chiefly on account of Gautier's articles upon her acting.

Mme. Païva was a strange, notorious person of many marriages, many vicissitudes, who yet seems usually to have managed to be kept in comfortable financial status. When she came to Paris, she was the widow of a poor tailor of New York. She was the Marquis de Païva at the period of her greatest success. Gautier, the Goncourts, Sainte-Beuve,

Taine, Houssaye, Girardin and others went to her receptions—the same people who frequented the Princesse Mathilde's drawing-room. Mme. Païva had been the mistress of the Duc de Grammont, of the Duc de Guiches, of Lord Stanley, and of other men. She told Gautier that there was a time when she determined to take poison if she failed to satisfy her ambition, which was to own the finest house in Paris. And, according to the proverb: *Que femme veut, Dieu le veut*, it appeared to be God's will that she should establish herself as Mme. la Marquise de Païva et Aranjo, in the great house in the Champs-Élysées, the Hôtel Païva which made her famous. In addition to her other distinctions, she was supposed to be the illegitimate daughter of Prince Constantin of Russia. She was not beautiful at the time of her fame, and the Goncourts seemed to see in her pale face the traces of a dreadful past.

She was fashionably as well as magnificently lodged in the Champs-Élysées, for the Faubourg-Saint-Germain was entirely out of date. The Princesse Mathilde thoroughly disapproved of her, but that did not prevent her literary friends from calling at the Hôtel Païva. The Goncourts, celebrated for emphasizing the least attractive features in their portraits, assert that Mme. Païva lacked charm and humour, was proud, mysterious, cold, calculating, and though she gave elaborate and delicious dinners, she had not the art of conversation; that she looked like a faded, painted actress from the provinces, with false hair and a false smile; that her house was much too heavily and elaborately furnished and decorated. Her literary friends came for the food and wine, and their own conversation.

The Goncourts continued to eat at her table and to make the most disagreeable remarks behind her back.

Mme. de Girardin was a completely different person. Her mother, Mme. Sophie Gay, was also a brilliant woman, in every way the charming accomplished Parisienne, with the grace, the wit, the manners of an eighteenth-century *grande dame*. Napoleon once said to Mme. Gay: "Do you know that I do not like witty women?" "So I have heard," replied Mme. Gay, "but I did not believe it." Her salon, during the First Empire, had been a refuge for outraged aristocrats, and, in later years, Balzac met Hugo, Vigny, Lamartine and George Sand at her house, where he had been introduced by Mme. Récamier. In *La Femme de Trente Ans*, Mme. d'Aiglemont is a picture of Mme. d'Abrantès, whom he met through Mme. Récamier, and in many of his novels there are points of indebtedness to these ladies.

Delphine Gay had been brought up by her mother to be the inheritress of her salon. Before her marriage to Émile de Girardin, Gautier had seen her in a box at the first night of *Hernani*, when she had established herself as the friend of the Romanticists, and had seemed to Gautier the most beautiful and charming person in the audience. She befriended Balzac, as her mother had done, and all Mme. Gay's friends were hers, though she had not all her mother's brilliance, the wit, which, like that of Mme. du Deffand, was only extinguished by death. Delphine was an enthusiast, a lover of liberty, interested in George Sand's ideas of social reform. Her presence had an inspiring

effect on Balzac, whose conversational powers were delightful to her, and she enjoyed the loud heartiness of his laughter. He and Gautier sometimes stayed at her house till two or three in the morning talking or reading aloud to her, and one night they all went with M. de Girardin to Auteuil, where Balzac was certain he knew the house where lived a sorceress. He knocked at the wrong door, angered the proprietress by insisting she must be the sorceress, and could only be persuaded by long argument to leave the place, which he did, finally, with much good-natured profanity. Mme. de Girardin took up new fads as they came along, spiritism and other pastimes. Her greatest ambition was to write. She rather too complacently allowed herself to be called the "Tenth Muse," and had formerly called herself the "Muse de la Patrie," says d'Heilly. She did not succeed in writing anything of special worth, but it appears that *Cléopâtre* was rather better than most of her theatrical ventures, and Rachel appeared in this and another of her plays.

In later years there was something imposing and melancholy in Mme. de Girardin's beauty. She seemed, thought Gautier, to be looking forward to death as a relief from some secret grief that had made her weary of a life which, on the whole, had been fortunate and happy.

The Princesse Mathilde was the daughter of Jérôme Bonaparte. She was to have married her cousin Napoleon III, but her father did not approve of the match. "She wanted to marry the Czar," say the Goncourts. She actually married Prince Anatole Demidov, whose conduct resulted in a separation, and the Czar compelled him to give

her a large income. Some thought that the affairs of the Second Empire would have prospered had she been in Eugénie's place. She was loyal to the Emperor, but she frequently lost patience with him: "Ah! if I could prevent him from conspiring against himself," she was wont to exclaim. "That man! He is immovable, neither spirited, nor impressionable. He never loses his patience, and his most forceful remark is: 'That's absurd!' If I had married him, I think I should have broken his head to find out what—if anything—there is in it!"

She was one of Gautier's devoted friends. He was frequently a guest in her house, and in 1868 she made him her librarian—rather a futile sort of position. After the war of 1870 she gave him a pension which she said was one of Napoleon III's debts which she would take it upon herself to pay; and she made Gautier's son a government clerk.

Among the habitués of her salon were Flaubert, Sainte-Beuve, Mérimée, Sandeau, Feuillet, the Dumas, the Goncourts and, later, Maupassant. Taine was her friend, but she never forgave him for his written opinion of Napoleon I. She held her court chiefly at her country-place, Saint-Gratien, though she had a house in Paris. She did a little painting, she was not very fond of music, she had not the attitude of Flaubert in regard to novels. "I love," she said, "only the stories of which I should like to be the heroine"; yet she did what she could to help struggling writers and to defend their novels from governmental attacks and charges of immorality.

Dumas was frequently to be seen at Saint-Gratien, "a sort of a giant with grey hair like a negro's, with a sharp little eye like that of a hippopotamus, and with big round



features like the man-in-the-moon. There is something in him of the conjurer, of a commercial traveller of the *Thousand and One Nights*. He talks constantly of himself, revealing the most extraordinary facts which he draws in a deep voice out of the storehouse of his experience. His vanity is like that of an amusing child, and one does not tire of it. He does not smoke or drink." The Goncourts give a different picture of Dumas  *fils*, whose wit was more brilliant than his father's, and who sometimes shocked the Princesse but amused her guests.

The conversation at Saint-Gratien often turned on love. Sainte-Beuve would tell the Princesse how desperately depressed he was, for he was sure he would never fall in love again. Edmond de Goncourt told her how much her mind, her heart, her imagination meant to him, and that, if he were in love with her, he was sure he would be more jealous of her children than of her husband. The Princesse liked and admired Sainte-Beuve, who thought her handsome, queenly, interesting, but not at all subtle. She was certainly not fond of Sainte-Beuve's subtleties as a friend. She had asked him not to write for "*Le Temps*," which was dominated by her enemies; Sainte-Beuve proceeded to write for that newspaper an article not calculated to please the Bonapartes, and the Princesse announced: "I shall never speak to Sainte-Beuve again. It is due to him that I have quarrelled with the Empress." She had done much for Sainte-Beuve, and there were newspapers owned by the Girardins for which he could have written without offending her, and she naturally felt that he owed her a clear loyalty.

In the correspondence of Flaubert and George Sand there

are letters which express the opinion that much was to be said on both sides, and Sainte-Beuve was not the only one of her friends with whom the Princesse had had difficulties. Taine and About had also displeased her, yet it is not easy to call Sainte-Beuve's offence a mere question of misunderstanding. In the case of the Princesse, "as in the case of the 'Cénacle' and in the case of Mme. Récamier and others, Sainte-Beuve's emancipation seemed to be dearer to him than his friendships," says a recent biographer. His nervous irritability could only be soothed by dropping a friend or two. He cared for his friends, but it was an inconvenience to be considerate of them, and Sainte-Beuve was impatient, and, eventually, disloyal. The Princesse had felt she could never forgive Sainte-Beuve, but at the time of his death she relented.

At Saint-Gratien, after luncheon at 11.30, she and her guests went out on a veranda and talked, or looked at picture-albums and caricatures—the fat old Abbé Coquereau dressed in baby-clothes, and other interesting drawings. They would walk down to the lake in the *parc* and through the gardens, and go driving in the afternoons. Sometimes the Princesse spent the entire morning in her studio. Gautier, now and then, stayed a week at Saint-Gratien, and Flaubert several days, but most of their visits were shorter. The Princesse lived till 1904, but as early as 1871 her conversation had become less animated, and often she would go to sleep after dinner, then suddenly rouse herself and talk for an hour or two. Sometimes she only appeared to be asleep, and one night when two guests were discussing a great Italian family, the Princesse suddenly remarked: "All that family are bastards."

At the time of the Revolution of 1848, the Comédie-Française was in danger of commercialism. It was largely due to Rachel and to the director (Arsène Houssaye, whom she managed to keep in office in spite of much opposition) and to Gautier's assistance in the newspapers, that the House of Molière remained true to the cause of art and poetry from which it had been drifting toward the more profitable and less worthy theatrical influences. It required the genius of Rachel to interest Gautier in the classic French dramas, and his articles are full of praise for her magnificent performances in *Phèdre*, and many of the plays which the innovations of Hugo's Romanticist ventures had, in previous years, overshadowed.

"The distinction and grace of Rachel," said Gautier, "were as marked in private life as on the stage." No one could more naturally and simply be the great lady, and there was an ease of manner, a brilliant gaiety which made her a charming hostess. She was as witty as she was beautiful. Gautier, the Girardins, Musset and others often went to her house for supper after the play, and Musset describes a special one of these occasions when, after cooking supper herself, Rachel sat down to read *Phèdre*, in which, as yet, she had not appeared. She pronounced the words in a low voice; Musset sat beside her, watching her as she read and as she nodded or waved good-bye to her guests with whom she had been talking and who were taking an informal departure. After everyone but Musset had gone, Rachel, almost as if chanting a litany, read her lines in a low monotone. Suddenly her eyes shone, her face grew pale, the colour came and went, the genius of *Phèdre* had transported her. "Never," says Musset, "have I seen anything so



RACHEL





beautiful, so absorbingly interesting, nor did she ever, in the theatre, move me quite so deeply as that night, her first reading of the play."

A remarkable account of Rachel's recital of the *Marseillaise* is Gautier's best tribute to her genius:

"Tall and splendid in her white robe, she advanced with slow majestic steps to the footlights. I have never seen anything more terrible, more awe-inspiring than her entrance. The audience was held spell-bound before she had uttered a word. The livid paleness of her face, the black look of revolt inspired by suffering, the blood-shot eyes, the eyebrows contracted like serpents, the lips tightly holding back a whirlwind of curses, the nostrils inflated as if to breathe deeply the air of freedom as she emerged from the damp dungeons of a prison. Hers was a fearful grace, a sinister beauty that could but cause a feeling of terror and of admiration. It seemed as if Nemesis, slow-moving and inexorable goddess, had suddenly turned to life a Greek statue. She raised her arm above her head with a gesture of controlled violence. Then in a harsh and strident voice, monotonous like the sounding of a tocsin, she spoke:—'allons enfants'—she did not sing, she did not recite. It was a declamation like an ancient melopœia, a strange uncanny music. More forceful, more savage than ever seemed the *Marseillaise*; the sharp incisiveness, the threatening, vindictive anger, the metallic ring of her voice bespoke the coming of some dark doom. The variety of her gestures and postures admirably expressed the progress of the drama, line by line—the drama of the hymn. How proudly her head, held high, seemed to feel the breeze of a new freedom, a release from the cruel bondage which had

held her down so long! What treasures of stored and heaped-up hate, what burning thirst for vengeance were betrayed by the clenched fists, by the nervous energy held trembling in the cold power of unshakable resolution! And with what sudden and passionate tenderness, as if bursting into tears at the sacred thought of the patriotism she served, did she kneel, while her floating draperies seemed the mantle of the national flag!

"This truly sublime close of the performance caused the house to break into transports of applause. She had made all other recitations of the poem, sung or spoken, sound by comparison like a tinkling air from *Don Pasquale*, or a pretty little poem recited in a drawing-room."

## CHAPTER XIV.

### *Poetry, Criticism and Literary Theory*

IN the *Idylles et Légendes* of Anatole France, there is a poem to Gautier:

#### AU POÈTE

*Gautier, doux enchanteur à la parole fière,  
Habile à susciter les contours précieux  
Des apparitions qui flottaient dans tes yeux,  
Tu fis avec bonté ton œuvre de lumière.  
Le royal talisman, le prompt évocateur,  
Le verbe arma ta bouche abondante en images;  
Mieux que l'anneau mystique et la verge des Mages  
La parole servit ton vouloir créateur.*

\* \* \*

*Que pour nous l'univers se baigne tout entier  
Des effleuves charmants de la pensée humaine!  
Que sur tous les chemins où le destin nous mène  
Tes apparitions se lèvent, O Gautier!*

And in the same volume of his poems, Anatole France addresses to Gautier a stanza on his novel *Arria Marcella*:

*Le creux d'un sein charmant que la cendre moula  
Fut la coupe où tu bus cette ivresse éloquente,  
Qui, sous l'étroit portique aux volutes d'acanthé,  
Fit surgir dans la pourpre Arria Marcella.*

Gautier, as a poet, "did not, like Baudelaire, find the beautiful in the horrible," says Saintsbury. The subjects of his poems are more usual, his sense of beauty is plastic, and his main effort is not an attempt to deeply probe the darkest places of human suffering and thought. As has been observed, Baudelaire praises him, as a poet, in the highest terms, sincerely or not, as one may be led to believe. In *L'Art Romantique*, Baudelaire asserts that Gautier's principal merit is that of being a great poet, "the equal of the greatest in the past, a model for those of the future, a diamond of increasing rarity in an age drunk with ignorance and materialism: in a word, Gautier is the perfect type of the man of letters." And he adds that Gautier will be quoted in matters of style and language as one quotes a Buffon, a la Bruyère, a Chateaubriand. It would be amusing to know that Gautier had these remarks in mind when he referred to Baudelaire as an "impeccable critic."

In the preface to the two volumes of his poems (exclusive of the *Émaux et Camées*) Gautier says: "The author of the present work is a cool and not too vigorous young man who lives with his family, spends his time with two or three friends, and about as many cats. . . . He is of no political party, . . . he is nothing. He writes poetry in order to excuse himself for doing nothing, and he does nothing in order to excuse himself for writing poetry. . . . In general, he thinks that as soon as a thing becomes useful it ceases to be beautiful. Art is freedom, luxury, the delight of the soul in the midst of idleness. Painting, sculpture and music are absolutely devoid of utility. . . . In these poems there are no high mountains nor distant views. There are little landscapes and interiors in the manner of

the Dutch painters, gentle, peaceful in effect, and not adorned with the brightest colours. If they are not well received by the public, the author will not be sorrowful. His verses will have agreeably employed a number of hours, for the pursuit of art is the greatest compensation for being alive. . . . The artist is like a day-labourer, and he needs no more intelligence than such a worker."

In his preface to *Émaux et Camées*, Gautier says: "Each of these little poems is a medallion with which one might adorn the cover of a casket. The author has permitted himself to chisel out of the white or fawn-coloured surface of his marble a pure, modern profile; and to dress the hair of Grecian beauties of Paris, seen at great balls, in the style of coiffure represented on ancient coins of Syracuse."

The most important of his long poems is *Albertus, ou L'Âme et le Péché, légende théologique*; but this title is not a happy choice either for the predominant qualities of this particular poem or for Gautier's general field of work. "The soul and punishment" is Baudelaire's province, and it would have been better for Gautier to have chosen as subtitle for his poem "the body and its punishment," for it is in a series of pictures that lies the greatest effectiveness of *Albertus*. Occasionally one finds a tinge of the Baudelairean quality in Gautier's poems, but merely a suggestion (something that, one recognizes, would have been done in a more masterly fashion by the author of *Les Fleurs du Mal*), as, for example, these lines in *La Vie dans la Mort*:—

*Pour en avoir le mot, courtisanes rusées,  
J'ai pressé, sous le fard, vos lèvres plus usées  
Que le grès des chemins.*



*Égouts impurs où vont tous les ruisseaux du monde,  
J'ai plongé sous vos flots; et toi, débauche immonde,  
J'ai vu tes lendemains.*

Some of Gautier's poems have a musical and harmonious freshness akin to the exquisite beauty of the short poems of Leconte de Lisle, as may be noticed in certain verses in the *Émaux et Camées*. In *Tristesse de Mer*:—

*Les mouettes volent et jouent,  
Et les blancs coursiers de la mer,  
Cabrés sur les vagues, secouent  
Leurs crins échevelés dans l'air—*

And Gautier's plastic sense in *l'Obélisque de Luxor*:

*Je veille, unique sentinelle  
De ce grand palais dévasté,  
Dans la solitude éternelle  
En face de l'immensité—*

—an expression to be found along broader and more general lines in the famous *L'Art*:

*Tout passe. L'Art robuste  
Seul a l'éternité.  
Le buste  
Survit à la cité—*

—in which a sense of vital massive solidity is conveyed within the limits of a miniature.

It is in poems of delicate touch, of exquisite workmanship, as in the *Noël*, that Gautier achieves his special perfection:—

*La neige au chaume coud ses franges,  
Mais sur le toit s'ouvre le ciel,  
Et, tout en blanc, le chœur des anges  
Chante aux bergers: Noël! Noël!*

Although Gautier reproduces the colour and atmosphere of far-off places and of wild desolate regions, he has not Leconte de Lisle's breadth and power. One has but to compare Gautier's *L'Hippopotame* and Leconte de Lisle's *Les Éléphants*. The significance of Gautier as a poet is chiefly to be found in instances of bright smoothness and of restful charm. Even in his darker pictures, the twilight is essentially the lingering of day rather than a foreshadowing of night. In the first volume of the *Poésies Complètes*:

*Par tes lèvres, fraîche églantine,  
Grenade en fleur, riant corail,  
D'où sort une voix argentine  
À travers la nacre et l'émail.*

[—SERMENT.]

*Aux vitraux diaprés des sombres basiliques,  
Les flammes du couchant s'éteignent tour à tour;  
D'un âge qui n'est plus précieuses reliques,  
Leurs dômes dans l'azur tracent un noir contour.*

[—SONNET.]

*Sur la bruyère arrosée  
De rosée  
Sur le buisson d'églantier;  
Sur les ombres futaies*

*Sur les haies*  
*Croissant au bord du sentier. . . .*  
[—LA DEMOISELLE]

In a letter written two years after Gautier's death, Swinburne refers to him as "the most luminous of poets," and asserts that he had been, "almost from boyhood, Gautier's ardent admirer." And it is not surprising, in view of Sainte-Beuve's usual preferences, that he should refer to Gautier in the following manner: "When one reads Gautier intelligently, it is easy to see clearly the pictures he paints, like a tracery of fine sand at the bottom of the beautiful lake of indifference in which he disports himself."

It is perhaps just as well that Gautier was not able to devote himself entirely to the writing of poetry as he wished to do. It is probable that he would have written nothing to add to his greatness as a poet; and the long list of his prose productions makes him a more significant figure in literature than he could otherwise have been.

For Gautier the critic, not so much may be said as for Gautier the novelist and travelling-essayist. Yet he was better than most of the critics of his time, and his articles on painting and music and the theatre are always well-written and frequently valuable. His critical attitude is expounded in an essay he wrote for "L'Artiste":

"We have often been accused of leniency, and we do not deny the allegation. Criticism, we feel, should be a demonstration of the beauties, not a search for the faults of a work of art. We do not believe it to be the mission of the critic to mark and grade an artistic production in the manner of a school-teacher correcting examination papers.

To study the artist's work, to understand it, and to help others to appreciate it—this is what we try to do."

As a journalist, Gautier was bound to restrain his utterance, but in conversation he went to violent extremes, and consequently one finds his articles too generous and his spoken criticism too severe. He *wrote* that Lamartine's *Jocelyn*, "that purest poem of the soul," deserved the many tears, the great popularity which had extolled it, and he *said* that Racine and Molière were to be condemned.

"In La Harpe's time," wrote Flaubert, "there were grammarians; in Taine's and Sainte-Beuve's time there are historians. When will there be artists, excellent artists, artists exclusively interested in art? Where can you find a critic worthy of the name? There is plenty of careful analysis of causes and sources, of environment and heredity. But what of poetry *itself*, of composition, of style, of the point of view of the author? Nothing. . . . The true Parisian is more idolatrous than a negro!" The critic, according to Baudelaire, should be poetical, and amusing as well, in order to avoid, by two sure means, the understanding and the dry-as-dust specimens of the species. Croce asserts in his *Esthetic* that "Flaubert wrote of art profoundly; better, perhaps, than any other Frenchman has ever written"; and, next to Flaubert, many of the highest honours may fairly be awarded to Baudelaire, for, in spite of the magnitude of Sainte-Beuve's contribution to the literature of criticism, his greatest services were rendered to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In so many instances he failed to grasp the meaning and the importance of other fields of art.

"There is not a single new idea, not one truth, of any

depth, concerning humanity in Gautier's articles," said Zola; and Delacroix wrote that "Gautier describes a painting, and makes a charming picture of it in his own manner, but has never done one act of veritable criticism." In answer to these denunciations, a remark of Gautier's in regard to music may be quoted: "It seems to me that even after Beethoven and Wagner, music is still a very young art, a territory which has hardly been explored; and that the discoveries already made are simply the beginning of the quest." This is a remarkable statement in an age which understood music very imperfectly, and generally preferred Rossini and Weber to Wagner. "What I like about music," said one of the Goncourts, "is the women who listen to it"; and people were generally fond of making facetious remarks on the subject, even persons who, like Baudelaire and Gautier, could be intelligent in their appreciations. The fact that Gautier could refer to Rossini as "that god of music," and to the compositions of Weber as being "more truly celestial than any other 'human music' music"; that he could say that he could tell good music from bad, but didn't care which he heard; that he could call music the "most disagreeable of all noises"—these facts do not essentially matter; they are examples of cheap wit rather than of superficial judgment. In Gautier's opinion of the possibilities of the music of the future lies an answer to some of his objections to modern inventions. It had not occurred to him what might be done, along imaginative lines, with industrial and other mechanical contrivances. If he could have heard Honegger's *Pacific*, No. 231, he might not have liked it, but he would have recognized the truth of his own prophecy.



"Louis XIV," wrote Gautier in *Les Grotesques*, "hated truth in all things, and especially in art." And in a discussion at one of the Magny dinners he asserted that the "great monarch was scarcely five feet in height"; that he was a pig, and that Racine and Molière wrote like pigs. This attack on the seventeenth century had not begun in France, however. "Long before the French assault upon the ancient and honoured name of Boileau, Keats had blown the war-trumpet. Gautier himself does not treat it with greater contempt," says Brandes. The injustice of damning Molière and Racine because their writings are not in every way alien to the theories of Boileau, narrow and style-cramping as those theories may be, seems never to have occurred to Gautier. "How I hate the seventeenth century," he told the Goncourts, "with its tiresome, antipathetic manner, in contrast to the richness of the style of the sixteenth century and the clarity of that of the eighteenth." There seems, however, to have been scarcely more than one typical writer of the eighteenth century whom Gautier would appreciate. Voltaire was too cold; even his wit did not redeem him; but Laclos' *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* fascinated him by the "depraved insolence, the venomous grace, the smooth gloss of fine manners over corrupt morals." He recognized that novel as a masterpiece.

The theories of art of Gautier's time, and his relation to them, centre about the principle of "art for art's sake," of which he was the staunch advocate and, in fact, one of the founders as a dominating force, for years, in the literature of the nineteenth century. In the minds of his friends he personified the theory, so to speak, and even Brunetière, by no means an admirer of Gautier, admits it "to be some-

thing, after all, to have personified a theory in the history of art, as Gautier did." Art is its own end and aim, it was proclaimed, and if the public does not like it, so much the worse for the public, for the artist must not stoop to please. "Woe to the art whose beauty can only be seen by artists," said d'Alembert. "That remark," said the Goncourts, "is one of the stupidest which has ever been made"—even in the eighteenth century, Gautier would have added.

"The artists-for-art were pessimists," says Cassagne; "Flaubert, the Goncourts, Leconte de Lisle, Bouilhet, Baudelaire, Gautier were frankly so. To them, all life is full of illusion, all life is disappointing; if there are people who are happy, or seem to be, it is because their weakness or their blindness prevents them from understanding the universal phenomenalism so discouraging to the eyes of a philosophical poet. . . . Flaubert was an epileptic; Gautier had at times, the look, the manner of a person subject to hallucinations; Baudelaire fell a victim to paralysis; the Romanticist poet was usually a consumptive; the neo-romanticist was a neurotic whom nervous tension and strain had confounded."

It would be, of course, unfair to associate too closely the mental and physical disorders of the upholders of the art-for-art's sake theory with that theory itself. Baudelaire was not a victim of syphilis because he thought the public could never understand the most important artistic truths. And, in past times, the art-for-art theory and the science-for-science theory were not attended necessarily by a state of ill-health. The much-derided seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had believed in art-for-art, and the Goncourts (who were much more just and who knew

much more about those periods than Gautier) quote la Bruyère to the effect that the purpose of art is not essentially a matter external to art itself; and Buffon said, as has been observed, that the manner in which truth is stated is very probably more useful to humanity than that truth. In ancient times it was Aristotle's opinion that "the more useless and unpopular a science is, the more precious it may be regarded as being"; but it should be noted that Aristotle's definition of science was a broader one than is common in our day. In his preface to the *Poèmes Antiques*, Leconte de Lisle says: "Art and science, so long estranged, ought to be brought into close relationship, if not merged into each other. Science should fulfil its duty of pointing out to poetry its forgotten traditions, and of helping it to revive these traditions in the proper forms and technical mediums of that art." Havelock Ellis, in *The Dance of Life*, expresses the same general thought of the possible services to each other of art-for-art and science-for-science; the realization that art is partly scientific and that science is an art.

Though he believed in the art-for-art theory, as many of his remarks and writings show, Baudelaire could attack the extreme case, the "puerile exclusion of all ethics and often, even, of passion, which resulted in sterility." He admitted that poetry is its own end and aim, and that it should not try to moralize, and yet he perceived a deeper truth: "I defy anyone to find a work of imagination which complies with all the requirements of beauty and which is a pernicious influence." This proposition would be generally agreed to if all the kinds of beauty could be included in one definition, and in the minds of the majority of people

there is a tendency to admit very few *kinds* into the realm of the legitimate.

Much as Flaubert and Hugo differed in theory, there were points on which they agreed. "There is never more than one form which is exactly suitable for the expression of a given idea," said Hugo. "Destroy the form, and almost always you will destroy the idea." To which, if it be said: "Yet how many persons have expressed the same idea in different ways," the answer is: "Not the same idea, for inasmuch as any deviation from a given series of words alters, however slightly, the meaning, Hugo's statement is accurate." In later years, Hugo wrote to Baudelaire: "I have never believed in art-for-art, but in art-for-progress." At least, however, he goes on, to Baudelaire's greater satisfaction, to admit that "in the garden of poetry there is no forbidden fruit." One could have asked Hugo: "Progress toward or for what? The good of mankind or the betterment of poetry? Do you regard them as identical?" Perhaps George Sand answered the question: "I believe that the mission of art is the mission of love, and that the novel of to-day ought to supply the place of the parable and fable of the childish days of old. . . . The worth of our productions depends entirely on our own worth." Surely Hugo would have objected to the sentimentality of this attitude, though Balzac would have found at least a grain of truth in it, for he said that, in France, wit swamps sentiment; that Frenchmen reason well enough about art but do not always feel it deeply enough.

The old question of truth and morals—as if a truth were not, in itself, a moral lesson—and the old question of the normal and the abnormal, the guide-posts of popular crit-

icism. "Even genius," says George Moore, "does not find in the abnormal the sublime moments of the soul that it finds in the normal." But what or who is normal? Certainly not a sublime moment, nor a man who is capable of such an ecstasy. Sainte-Beuve and Musset agreed that the artist, at his best, can be understood by everyone, and that the effort of the artist should be to succeed with all sorts of readers. Yet when one ranges works of art in an approximate order of popularity, what verdict can be given? "Beauty is that which seems abominable in the eyes of the ignorant persons," said the Goncourts. "Beauty is that which the instinct of your servant and your mistress tell them to shun." Thus Sainte-Beuve and Musset vs. the Goncourts. The truth lies between. The artist should attempt neither to please nor to shock the uneducated. Even in conversation one cannot hope to delight everyone. It is not given to anyone to think or feel honestly in all directions at once, and the effort of genius must simply be to express itself as beautifully as possible.

"Art, and art only, is moral," says Faure, "for it is obedience to an instinct for rhythm and harmony which, sometimes, when the sense thereof has been lost, needs to be brought again to the consciousness of men by desperate means, perhaps even by the tumult of war. Obedience to rhythm incites a lyric exaltation, by which man may attain the loftiest moral heights." "All art," says Havelock Ellis, "is the rising and falling of a rhythmic curve between the classic and the decadent extremes," and he regards decadence from the æsthetic, not the moral, point of view, the decadent art being one in which essential form is shrouded and lost in a mass of insubordinate detail. "One must con-



sider always the true character of artistic history, intolerant of curb and rule, drawing her ever-varied productions from the well-head of the infinite Spirit. . . . In order to judge works of art, one must place oneself at the artist's point of view at the moment of production." And to this quotation from Croce one may add the remark of Leconte de Lisle: "The various manifestations of Beauty are of infinite possibility"—and the profound and pertinent observations of Swinburne: "I know nothing stranger in the history of criticism than the perversity of even eminent and exquisite critics in persistent condemnation of one great artist for his deficiencies in the qualities of another." The principles of artistic criticism are admirably and with vital suggestiveness laid down by the writers just quoted.

There is no one religion; there is no one morality; there is no one art. The greater the variety the better, for otherwise, in this world, it is impossible to escape the stereotypic art, the corrosion of time and usage upon a given manner and method. Veritable originality is a law unto itself, the danger being that a group of artists may catch an idiosyncrasy, a mannerism which ingenuity can make use of as an outward show of an originality altogether lacking in the imitator—a mannerism which was merely superficial, a personal medium involved in the working out of the problem of a leading artist, a creative genius. All creation is original, but the derived and the copied may pose as original, and in any new art it is difficult at times to be sure of the work that is essentially the artist's own reactions and the work that has been prompted by a study, not of nature itself, but of the productions of other artists. The technique of painting may be taught, but the power to see what to paint, and



the method by which one may best express what one sees, must be learned by the artist himself. Strangely enough it is frequently held against the artist that he has seen what others have not seen, with the implication that if others have not seen it, how can the artist dare to announce that he has? Or it is frequently said: "I have often had that idea, but have never been able to express it so well as this writer or that." No. One can always express the ideas one has. We look at the ocean in the moonlight. We have seen it often, thought about it, been pleased by it, read poems and descriptions of it, and our reactions are stimulated, but what is the result? We have had no idea on the subject. "Words failed us?" Certainly not, but imagination, even accurate observation was probably vague or wandering. Yet there are a thousand different ideas, a thousand possible pictures to be drawn from that one scene; and if we see them on page and canvas we are apt to believe we had them ourselves if they appeal to us, or to deny them any validity if they do not.

Art is like the dwarf in the *Nibelungenlied*, able to transform itself into a thousand different shapes. The critic is a naturalist in a strange, wild jungle. He should be interested in every new form of life he encounters. "Here is a bird," he should *not* say, "that I deny. The head is out of all proportion to the body, the colours are not harmonious, the tail is ridiculously short, the feet absurdly large. What perverted creator can have been responsible for such a specimen?" Nevertheless the bird exists, flies, walks, eats. If the artist has made his creation live, if we cannot deny the spark of life that somehow thrives in it, we must admit its validity. "But what of freaks, dwarfs, hunch-

backs, sickly creatures, are they permissible?" "Why not, if they live and breathe? In the mythology of art there are many strange creatures." The trouble is with the limits of human imagination. We may combine old colours, old forms, old tunes into new creative entities, but the result is apt to be nothing more profoundly new than a sea-monster or a harpy. History repeats itself in art as well as in politics, and there is patchwork where there should be the weaving of new cloth. "Art-for-art" is good, but art-for-the-artist is better, for it is the creative power itself which essentially matters and is eternally interesting.

"My theory of art"—is it better or necessary to have only one? Is there any advantage in limiting the field of one's enjoyment? It has been said: "Either Beethoven is wrong and Scriabine is right, or Scriabine is wrong and Beethoven is right. They are not both right." Why not? By what law and what authority? Art is the mystery of infinite possibility, ingenuity and fancy. "Who ever saw a horse that looked like that?" The artist who made it.

## CHAPTER XV

### *The Stories of Mérimée*

"MÉRIMÉE's nature is vile," says Victor Hugo in *The History of a Crime*. ". . . Morny knew all the great secrets of the Second Empire; Mérimée knew only the little ones. . . . I saw M. Mérimée coming toward me one day. 'I have been looking for you,' said he. 'I hope you will not find me,' I replied.—There was this difference between Mérimée and me: I despised him; he esteemed me."

This is one of Hugo's rhetorical exaggerations. All agree that Mérimée was much laughed at because of his subservience to the Empress, and to the Emperor whom Hugo was pleased to regard as "Napoleon the Little." He was Eugénie's court-jester, said the indifferent or the jealous. He had known her when she was the Countess de Montijo, and when she was in Spain he bought dresses and did other errands for her in Paris. When Napoleon III was writing his *Life of Cæsar*, Mérimée took notes for him on Roman history. Unlike many of the friends of the Empress's prosperity, Mérimée was faithful to her in her days of unpopularity, and this was held against him by Hugo, who regarded the Empire as having betrayed France. Eugénie's mother had helped Mérimée in his researches in Spain; she told him the story from which he wrote *Carmen*. Mérimée made the mistake of talking too much of the Empress's high regard for him, and, according to the Goncourts, his success at Court was due to his having "calculated the im-

pressive effects of his dry, biting irony as a means of astonishing and dominating feeble feminine minds."

Mérimée's career is not one of romance. He is a realist belonging less to his own time than to the preceding and succeeding periods. The lack of sentiment in his writings is much more marked even than in those of Gautier, yet the subjects and settings of his stories have the colour and background dear to the Romanticists. Though he had much in common with the eighteenth-century point of view, he did not confine himself to the comedy of manners so typical of that time, and though he is a novelist, he is colder, more precise, than the realist of the last years of the nineteenth century. Consequently it is difficult to place him. He is not a part of any of the strongest currents in the stream of the nineteenth-century literature. One of the strongest influences of his youth was his friendship for Stendhal. "I met him about the year 1820," wrote Mérimée, "and from that time till his death, in spite of the difference of our ages (Mérimée 1803-1870; Stendhal 1783-1842) we were always close friends. Few men have appealed to me more than he, and no other friendship has ever been so dear to me. We had scarcely a single point of view in common. We passed our time discussing in perfect good faith our different ideas, each suspecting the other of stubbornness and of a weakness for paradox, yet we never quarrelled and we were always glad of an opportunity to begin our arguments anew." Stendhal's impressions of Mérimée were thus recorded: "A young man in a grey frock-coat, very ugly and with a turned-up nose. His eyes were small and without expression, except that of ill-nature. There was something insolent and extremely unpleasant

about him. I am not very sure of his heart, but I am certain of his talent."

It would appear from these descriptions that Mérimée was the young man of promise following in the train of the recognized, the brilliant older writer who could not avoid his admirer, and who was perhaps sufficiently flattered by attention to endure him. Stendhal loved stories and anecdotes of the eighteenth century, and Mérimée was particularly fond of anecdotes—he said that history, without them, meant nothing to him. Stendhal was a broad-minded critic, and unusually so for a Frenchman, for he loved both Shakespeare and Racine. He is far superior in this respect to Mérimée, who could, for example, see nothing in the poetry of Baudelaire and who referred to Renan's *Life of Jesus* as the delight of all the servant girls in France.

Most of the descriptions of Mérimée's appearance and character are much, in effect, like Stendhal's. It seems that Mérimée was formal and frigid, of a medium height, "with a nose like a snout, a sensuous mouth and heavy jaws," (Du Camp). "It is in vain that he has his clothes made in England, that he wears elegant gloves; he will never be the perfect man of fashion that he aspires to be. The back of his head will always resemble that of a peasant; there will always be a vulgarity in his appearance," says Barbier. It was the opinion of Baudelaire and of Turgenev that underneath Mérimée's cold exterior lay a delicate, almost prudish sensibility, and it may be said that he was subject to a shyness which made it difficult for him to appear to be at ease in formal gatherings. He was capable of expressing ideas of justice surprisingly unconventional. "I think people attach too much importance to chastity.



It seems to me absurd that a woman should be banished from society for having a lover, while a woman who is miserly, double-faced and spiteful may be welcomed everywhere." Houssaye thought Mérimée malicious, never frank nor outspoken. "He cared more for the Court than for literary circles, and though he had the reputation of being witty, I never heard him make a witty remark." It is generally agreed that Mérimée feared ridicule more than anything else, and that this fear made him ridiculous, at times, for he had resolved in early youth, as the result of a childish embarrassment, never again to trust either himself or anyone else. Carlyle met Mérimée in Paris in 1851, and refers to him as a "modern pedant, not without conciseness, pertinency, and a certain sarcastic insight—on the whole no mortal of slightest interest or value to me"; and to the dear friend to whom two large volumes of Mérimée's letters are addressed, "Panizzi, whom I do not love, and who returns the feeling, will *not*, though solicited from various quarters—high quarters, some of them—admit me to the silent rooms of the King's Library, to a place where I *could* read and inquire. Never mind! No matter at all! Perhaps it is even better so." This is in reference to documents on the French Revolution which Carlyle is said to have refused to consult in the main reading-room, the only place then at his disposal.

The father of Mérimée was a painter and art critic, and his wife had been alienated by eighteenth-century rationalism from the habit of Catholic Church custom; therefore Prosper failed to be baptised—a neglect which he regarded as of no consequence. At the age of twenty-five, the influence of the eighteenth-century thought, and the prev-

alence in France of Romanticist theories steadily on the increase, and, in this connection, the admiration of Mérimée for Scott and Shakespeare, had divided his literary attention. Prosper Mérimée at heart, however, had never been a Romanticist. According to the latest biographer of his youth (Pierre Trahard), the *Chronique du Règne de Charles IX*, published at this time, shows that in spite of superficial resemblance, Mérimée's method was not that of Scott, as has been supposed, but that of Diderot; and that during the rest of his life Mérimée was a writer definitely committed to a method and manner derived principally from pre-revolutionary sources. Trahard observes that *La Jacquerie*, a theatrical work published in 1828, was written under the influence of Shakespeare, but that the *Chronique*, which appeared less than a year later, bears a marked similarity to Diderot's *Jacques le Fataliste*, a much more realistic type of romance than those of Scott, and full of the kind of anecdote for which Mérimée specially cared.

The charge of painting portraits that lack muscular solidity was brought against Mérimée by Gautier, and Mérimée regarded Gautier's writings as being generally no more than an elaborate collection of costumes and draperies.

The force of analysis in Stendhal's novels which so strongly impressed Balzac, Zola, and, in later years, Paul Bourget and others, meant nothing to Flaubert, who had no use for Stendhal's style. In order to get the "tone" which he needed in his writing, Stendhal was fond of saying that he habitually read the *Code Civil* as a preparation. It is strange, on the other hand, that Flaubert could not see what Swinburne calls the "exquisite jewelry and faultless carving" of Mérimée's style, and when Flaubert disparaged

Mérimée, Turgenev and the Goncourts said they could not understand his dislike. "Few men," says Du Camp, "have been more scrupulous as writers than Mérimée. He corrected his work again and again, and it has been said that he copied and altered the manuscript of *Colomba* sixteen times in succession. He read his works aloud before publishing them." One of his stories, *Lokis*, he refused to have printed till he had read it to the Empress and other ladies. Finding that his audience did not understand the horrible tale, he decided, says Filon, that it was fit for the public eye. In 1844 he was made a member of the Academy.

The greatest ability of Mérimée is that of the short-story writer. With the utmost effect of terror, surprise or tragic intensity he sets a dramatic incident in place. *La Chambre Bleue* is a striking example of a sense of horror turned sharply into the surprise of a mistake, a comedy. The force of character of a Carmen, a Colomba, is unrivalled, and the brutality, the relentlessness of the history of *Mateo Falcone*, *Lokis* and the *Venus d'Île*, compressed in each case into the smallest number of pages consistent with an established atmosphere, a sense of actuality, is the work of a master. The construction of his longer stories is not always good, and certainly not in the case of *Carmen*, though here the central character is of an intensity and interest that carries all before it. *La Prise de la Redoute* is thoroughly admirable in every respect, a story of military character, of soldierly virtue. In the best of his stories there is the inevitability of those of Maupassant, but the interest is centred more firmly (except in *Carmen* and *Colomba*) in situation and plot rather than in character. There are in

his tales suggestions of qualities of Diderot's stories, and the revenge of the Venus d'Île is no more appalling than that of Diderot's *La Marquise de la Pommeraye*. None of Diderot's emotional effects, as in *La Religieuse*, can, however, be found in the fiction of Mérimée.

For a short time, he was the friend of George Sand. But she wrote to Sainte-Beuve in July, 1833: "On a day of boredom and despair, I met a calm, strong man who did not in the least understand me, and who laughed at all my troubles. I was entirely fascinated by the power of his mind, and for eight days I believed that he knew the secret of happiness, that he would tell me how to be happy, and that his disdainful unconcern would heal me of my petty and childish sensitiveness. I thought he had suffered as I had suffered, and that he had conquered his own weaknesses. I am not yet sure whether I have been deceived in thinking that this man is strong, not in greatness, but in littleness of character and worth. He, at any rate, persuaded me that I might enjoy a kind of love endurable to the senses, intoxicating to the soul. The experiment was an utter failure. I wept in my pain, my disgust, my discouragement. Instead of an affection that could soothe and sympathize, I found a bitter, mocking raillery."

Mérimée's break with George Sand came after he had met Jenny Dacquin, and at the time George Sand was about to unite herself to Musset. It was to this Jenny Dacquin that Mérimée wrote his famous *Lettres à une Inconnue*, and he seems to have loved her for a time with considerable fervour. She had read his *Chronique*, she had come from Boulogne after writing him to the effect that she was an admiring, titled English lady. Mérimée had feared she

might not be young (she was in fact nineteen) and had been still more afraid she might not have a title. The calming of the lesser fear was sufficient recompense for the realization of the greater, but Mérimée's letters reflect no very absorbingly interesting passion. Most of his life was spent in uneventful comfort, and for some years he lived in an apartment in Paris with his mother, a favourite cat, and two little brown owls. He passed the winters of his last years at Cannes with two English ladies, Miss Lagdon and Miss Ewers, who walked by his side carrying his sketching-utensils, his umbrella and camp-stool, or his bow and arrows when he felt more energetic. When he had shot his arrows they would go and pick them up for him. They were perfect ladies. They carried white gloves which they never put on, and they wore green veils. What an extraordinary trio! Jenny Dacquin laughed when she heard of Mérimée and his very respectable friends. He died at Cannes, September 23, 1870. During the siege of Paris his carefully chosen, rare and valuable collection of books was burnt in his town house.

The one real love of his life was France, and it alone survived all his efforts for impartiality and disillusionment. He affectionately remembered the Empress long after he had given up the Empire in despair, and ten days before his death he wrote: "All my life I have striven to be free from prejudice and to be a citizen of the world rather than primarily a citizen of France. But all these philosophical attitudes are worthless. I bleed to-day, for the wounds of the foolish French are mine, and no matter how ungrateful, how ridiculous the French may be, I shall always love them."

A strange life, this of Mérimée, not happy on the whole;



a case of repression resulting in loneliness. He was one of the peculiar literary types of which the Paris of the Second Empire was full; he was one of the many writers whose natural pessimism was increased and intensified by the blunders and futilities of the reign of "that nephew of his uncle," —"Napoleon the Little."

## CHAPTER XVI

### *George Sand, The Goncourts, Sainte-Beuve*

It is difficult to deal fairly with a personage with whom time has dealt as heavily as it has with George Sand. Many of her weaknesses were perceived during her life, but a magnetism and a charm which were felt by her contemporaries have not survived. It is not so with many other famous women. The fascination of a Mme. Recamier, a Mary Stuart, a Marie Antoinette, is enduringly understandable, whatever one may think of questions of character in these cases; but, to modern minds, it is next to impossible to find in George Sand the alluring personality, the force of particular appeal. She remains a curious puzzle, a woman of great gift, but definitely belonging to her own time, and her special literary and personal powers seem chiefly a part of the intricacy of Romanticist sentimentality and misty mentality in their least significant and least permanent manifestations. From the point of view of a series of quarrels, of a constant attempt to put others in the wrong, the story of George Sand, like those of Musset and of Sainte-Beuve, and like so many similar aspects of the troubles of the Romanticists, is full of the mania of Rousseau, the thread of his morbid self-consciousness.

The alleged habit of George Sand of riding horseback with M. de Lamennais along the Boulevards of Paris—she dressed as a man and he as a woman—is one of a series of strange pictures in which contemporary accounts present her.

The Goncourts were not subject to her spell, and they describe her as having "an automatic aspect. She speaks in a monotonous, mechanical voice, and there is in her attitude a gravity and placidity, an effect of being half asleep. She is always smoking a cigarette, and her gestures are slow. She can be very agreeable, but she has a way of being depressingly good-natured, and she expresses herself in platitudinous phrases." Gautier, after visiting her at Nohant, noted his impressions in a letter. "Breakfast at ten: George Sand arrives on the scene like a sleep-walker. In the garden, after breakfast, talk improves. She writes in her room from three to six. After dinner she plays patience till midnight, without saying a word." Gautier complains that her tendency was not sufficiently to his taste to discuss literary subjects exhaustively, though one night he kept her arguing about Rousseau till one A. M. He says that one night she finished writing a novel and began another before morning. She had a small theatre on her place where private theatricals were frequently performed. "She is tranquillity itself," Gautier concludes, "but her sense of humour is slow, for she seldom sees the point of a joke till long after everyone else has laughed. It would, however, be impossible for anyone to be, at the same time, *meilleure femme et meilleur garçon*."

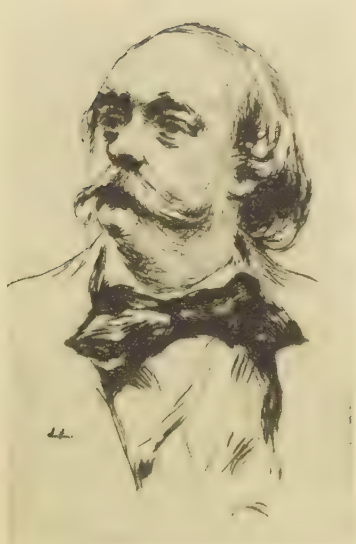
Balzac and George Sand were friends, but not uncritically so. Balzac painted a none-too-flattering portrait of her in *Béatrix*, and in discussion the two novelists differed frequently and fundamentally. In the *History of My Life*—a work in ten volumes of which Henry James said one gathers "every delightful impression except the impression of an impeccable veracity"—George Sand speaks of Balzac's

good-nature, sincerity, tremendous industry, love of life, his naïve fondness for talking about himself, his sobriety in all passions but that of work. On one occasion, Balzac said to her: "You seek for man as he should be; I seek him as he is. We are both right, and the roads on which we travel lead to the same place." But he could never picture her as giving, as he confessed to do, "terrible and grotesque proportions to human deformities." When Balzac attempted to read parts of his *Contes Drolâtiques* to her, she called it "too indecent," and tried to throw the book in his face, whereupon Balzac called her a prude. "We remained good friends, however," is the testimony of the *History of My Life*. Balzac wrote Mme. Hanska: "For three successive nights George Sand and I talked from five P. M. till five A. M. . . . She has neither force of conception nor gift of plot-construction, nor the faculty of being truthful, nor the art of pathos; but—though her knowledge of the French language has its limitations—she has *style*. . . . She jokes about her fame as I do about mine, and has a profound contempt for the public, to which she attaches the name 'Jumento.' . . . She is a great, generous, devoted, chaste artist. In general her appearance is much more that of a man than of a woman."

As to George Sand's style, Mme. de Girardin brilliantly said that in her case, especially, "*le style c'est l'homme*," in reference to the fact that the chief use to which she put her love-affairs was to act as material for novels. Consequently she constantly needed new ones. Her being an inconstant mistress is, however, no more endlessly absorbing a topic than that of her novels, in which the germ of tedium has grown and thrived and multiplied with time. There was



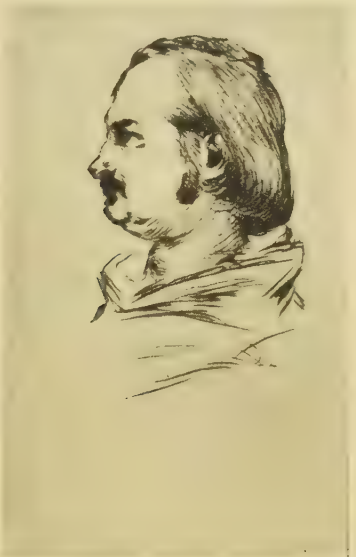
SAINT-BEUVE



FLAUBERT



MÉRIMÉE



BALZAC





too much woe on her lovers' parts and too much moralizing on hers. A few lines from her correspondence with Musset give the tone:

MUSSET: "I shall put the sea and the mountains between us. . . . I know what this will cost me, but my Father up There will not call me a coward when I appear before Him. Oh, my fiancée! Place gently upon my brow the crown of thorns, and good-bye. . . . Ah, my God, I am very young. What have I done. . . ?"

SAND: "Ah! you still love me too much; we must never see each other again. Your expressions which I had hoped would soften and moderate, are no longer those of pure friendship. . . . Good-bye, my poor child! Ah! Were it not for my children how gladly would I throw myself into the river!" The method of George Sand was to accuse her lovers of having shown themselves unworthy of a love as pure as hers. Their love did not need to be so pure at first; but when they wearied her, she felt the need of an extraordinary self-forgetfulness and an uncomplaining compliance on their part with any mood that might happen to settle itself upon her; and if they did not comply, she said to them, as Celimène said to Alceste: "You do not love me as a man should love." At the end of the *History of My Life*, George Sand asserts that "there is nothing strong in me except the need of love"—but she did not add: "the need for a constantly changing object thereof." One has no quarrel with anyone who needs a change, for certain people are always in need of a change, and they had better change, and change whenever necessary, since nothing but bitterness or other afflictions are ever gained by a hollow and meaningless appearance of devotion to things and persons who have

ceased to be vital forces in a formerly happy relationship. One has a perfectly definite objection, however, to the statement that the object of one's former affection has ceased to be worthy thereof when the fact is, simply, that one has become weary of it. Never, as far as we know, did George Sand simply say: "I am bored"; and this is the main source of the persistent, even if unconscious, lack of frankness and truth in her writings. She constantly idealized herself, her motives, her ideals, her efforts; and her sermons and sentiments held her thought in chains. There were women in Germany, in her time, who resembled her. Rahel Varnhagen, Bettina von Arnim, Charlotte Stieglitz were bent upon influencing men and literature, and thereby caused themselves many tears and great moments of emotional exaltation. It was the fashion to have an affair with George Sand, and she naturally aroused a curiosity which only experience could satisfy, and the men of her time were apt to be as sentimental, to have the same need of love, of tears, of fault-finding as she. Sometimes her friendships were happier than her loves. She and Flaubert carried on a delightful correspondence, and were capable of friendship unspoiled by the infatuation which, in George Sand's case, was always fatal. They understood each other, they did not love each other, and, consequently, there was no need for tears.

The opinions of Nietzsche are not always remarkable for subtlety or for fine distinctions, but he attains a degree of truth in a violent reference to one of George Sand's works: "Like everything that springs from Rousseau's influence, it is false, made-up, blown-out and exaggerated. . . . I cannot bear this vulgar striving after generous feelings. . . .

How self-complacent this prolific, ink-yielding cow! . . . And Renan adores her!" So he did, "like nearly all cultivated Frenchmen," says George Brandes. In one of his letters, Taine confesses that, after reading a little of George Sand, "my soul boils over, and there is a physical and moral stir in my heart and mind." Perhaps the height of over-praise was attained by Sainte-Beuve: "Mme. Sand is a greater writer, more sure and firm than Balzac." One may prefer Carlyle's generally indiscriminative judgments on things French to Taine's and Sainte-Beuve's rhapsodies. It is reported by Froude that for Mme. Sand and all her works, for all sentimental literature whatsoever, Carlyle's dislike amounted to loathing. He calls it somewhere "'a new Phallus worship with Sue, Balzac and Co. for prophets and Mme. Sand for a virgin.'" How strange this error of comparing George Sand in any way to Balzac!

It is not surprising to find that George Sand's critical judgments were extravagant. She thought Harriet Beecher Stowe a saint! And she regarded Chateaubriand's *Memoirs* as "immoral." In support of the spirit of these quotations, one finds in Baudelaire's articles the excellent criticism that "in questions of morality George Sand has the profundity of concierges and harlots," and he adds that he cannot think of her without a shudder of horror.

The modern world has its own horrors, but it is doubtful if they will appear quite so odious to later generations as the particular sort of horror, the affectations, self-glorification and sentimental injustice inherent in the nature of a George Sand. Not that affectation is the whole story, but that it plays so large a part in the tale. So much of her thinking was distorted, so many of her real feelings were

inextricably mixed with her ideas of feelings she would have liked to have, that it is easy to be unfair to her. She loved love, and she believed that love was an answer to all questions of morals, of principles, and of other objections or conventional attitudes of disapprobation. In this theory she was sincere. But she seemed to find in life and literature a need for more than love itself as an excuse for love, and consequently the explanations with which her pages teem do not give a sense of directness and the force of frank confession. There are really charming descriptions of nature, and there are passages of undeniably intense emotion in her novels. There was in her the capacity for high inspiration, broad sympathy, deep friendship and strong passion. Unfortunately both in her books and in her life she could not let her genius speak always for itself.

"Let critics say what they will," wrote Edmond de Goncourt, "they will never prevent my brother and me from being the St. John the Baptist of modern neuroticism."

This is rather a large order. We would call Rousseau the St. John the Baptist, in this sense, with Chateaubriand and Byron for the two chief echoes of the voice crying in the wilderness. How fortunate for Rousseau, by the way, that the French Revolution did not prove to be his Salome!

"It is certainly remarkable," observe the Goncourts, "that the four men most entirely devoted to art, most utterly free from the taint of commercialism, should be the ones, in our time, to be brought before the tribunal of literary censorship—Baudelaire, Flaubert and ourselves. . . . "The work of literary purity, the book which an artist writes for his own satisfaction, seems to be a kind of writ-



ing in danger of extinction. At present we know of no one who practises this profession except Flaubert and ourselves."

The latter part of this quotation dates from after Gautier's death, for the Goncourts always regarded him as a worthy worker, according to their theories. They used Gautier as the model for their hero Charles Demailly in the novel of that name, and, as has been noted, their *Journal* is full of testimony to the high place held by Gautier in their opinion. In the chapter on Gautier's family life we had occasion to see what Gautier thought of the Goncourts as indefatigable reporters, and in his *Portraits Contemporains*, Gautier praises them as historical writers. "Michelet and Sainte-Beuve cite them as authorities," and indeed the Goncourts were admirably careful students, especially of the eighteenth century, as their *L'Art du 18<sup>e</sup> Siècle*, *La du Barry*, *Portraits Intimes du 18<sup>e</sup> Siècle*, and other works show. "Their toil was as serious as if they had been monks," said Gautier, "and their Parisian apartment was like a monastery, to this extent. They were tireless in their quest for documents, autographs, old newspapers, etc."

Jules de Goncourt died, at 40, "in the full vigour of youth." Verlaine remembered him, gay and humorous at a time when Edmond seemed much older (he was his brother's senior by only eight years) and very serious. They were both sensitive and high-strung, and in spite of temperamental differences they were inseparable, and though their friends found Jules much more lovable than Edmond, no one ever thought of inviting the younger without the older.

The novels of the Goncourts were written from a special

point of view, scrupulously documented from life. *Germine Lacerteux* is the story of their servant-girl Rose, on whom they took as voluminous notes as if they were preparing to write a historical treatise. This sort of writing naturally had a strong influence on Zola, whose power, however, is incomparably greater than that of the Goncourts, and who was to escape their sufferings from the morbid sensitiveness of the general Rousseau descent. Here, again, are to be noted the different symptoms manifested by their woes in distinction from those of Rousseau, Chateaubriand and Musset, who did not analyse their miseries in the scientific or medical manner employed by the Goncourt brothers. With the latter it was primarily a matter of nerves; with the others, a condition of the heart.

Though an ironical and often cynical attitude is characteristic of the *Journal*, there is often a brighter side, a more cheerful prospect to be found in the novels of the Goncourts. The story of *René Mauperin* is less depressing than a work of the fictional father of Zola might lead one to expect, and in *Manette Saloman* and *Charles Demailly* there are pages of brightness and of wit. It is rather the method than the result which is particularly significant in these cases, the emphasis on detail and an atmosphere born of an accumulation of minute elements, and this itself is an accomplishment, for in many instances no atmosphere whatever is thus achieved, and the effect on the reader is of chronological dryness or of unenlivened lists of facts, in the work of other authors.

The art of Flaubert, in the minds of the Goncourts, had much in common with theirs. It is to be observed, however,

that this is not the most favourable light in which to view the work of the brothers. They lose too much by the comparison. It is better to set them over against Zola. Yet, here again, there is a great difference, for Zola managed to create a haunting and sometimes monstrous and personified background for his human figures. In *Germinal* the mine becomes an ominous and inevitable creature; in *La Terre* the earth itself seems ready to spring up, to engulf, to swallow its victims. These fantastic and magnificent effects are the product of a greater, yet very similar, art, and it is one of the mysteries of genius that this gift was Zola's and not the Goncourts'.

"In the number of feuds probably no one, not even Hugo, surpassed Sainte-Beuve," writes his most recent biographer. In 1830 Sainte-Beuve had a journalistic quarrel with Du Bois; in 1834 he broke with Hugo chiefly on account of Mme. Hugo, whom Sainte-Beuve loved; in the same year he and Carrel were journalistically, he and Balzac were literarily, estranged; and he left Mme. Récamier, gave up her charming friendship because he felt he would thereby have a greater freedom in a small, but to his nervous sense, a necessary way. In 1837 he alienated Mme. Hugo and Buloz—but everyone quarreled with Buloz. There were other instances of hurt feelings; was it always Sainte-Beuve's fault? Probably not, but as in the case of Rousseau, one wearies of the complaints of a man whose nerves are always on edge. And then Sainte-Beuve had so many disappointments in his youth of which he so frequently talked in a curious vein of martyred reminiscence, a mix-

ture of definite recollection of pain and of the perverted satisfaction of having, after all, so sensitive a soul. There are pages marked with the glorified stains of tears in *Volupté* and *Joseph Delorme*.

The chief sources of Sainte-Beuve's woe were the failure which fate had visited upon his principal ambitions. He had longed to be a great and successful poet, and a great and successful lover. There is a passage in Nietzsche which, like that quoted above, in reference to George Sand, contains a malignant germ of truth. "He is full of petty spite toward all virile spirits—at bottom a woman with all a woman's revengefulness and sensuality." Sainte-Beuve was certainly full of petty spite toward Balzac, and Balzac was certainly a virile spirit. They were made to misunderstand each other, and they developed this natural capacity to proportions of astonishing degree. Sainte-Beuve was jealous of Balzac, but he honestly disliked his type of writing, the greatness of which he could not see, because it irritated his particular taste; and he noted with alarm for the future of literature that Balzac's vogue was on the increase, and he dreaded what he called the entrance upon the field of literature of processes and subjects suitable in his mind only for medical or chemical laboratories. It seemed to him dreadfully unfortunate that persons in Parisian society should act the parts, in real life, of heroes and heroines of Balzac, and it was no comfort to him that the reverse origin had been responsible for some of the enormous productivity of the great novelist.

The contest, which should have remained literary, became personal. Angered by Sainte-Beuve's articles, Balzac wrote others attacking the man whom he rapidly learned to detest;

and he showed a pettiness in other affairs, complaining that Buloz had sent copies of the "Revue des Deux Mondes" to George Sand and to Musset before sending one to him. According to Pailleron, Balzac accused one Roger de Beauvoir of having no right to either name. Beauvoir demanded a duel, but Balzac preferred to write forty pages of explanation, to which the reply of Beauvoir was simply that he cared nought for M. Balzac's prose—what he wanted was M. Balzac's skin. It seems that Balzac then wrote an article in the "Revue Parisienne" retracting his statements *in re* Beauvoir. It is often necessary in a consideration of the liability to controversy of men of this period to note the fact that it takes two to make a quarrel.

"Sainte-Beuve," said George Sand, "has too much wit for his heart and too much heart for his wit. . . . I do not understand him at all. I loved him in a friendly way, and he continually vexed, scolded and suspected me, till, finally, I told him to go to the Devil. He does not seem to know what friendship is, and I feel that he understands only how to love himself." Later on these broken bonds of sympathy were temporarily patched up, and, after her separation from Musset, George Sand sought Sainte-Beuve's consolation. "What is love?" she asked of him in her distress. "Tears," replied Sainte-Beuve. It is Pailleron's opinion that Dubois knew Sainte-Beuve better than anyone else, and Dubois referred to the great critic as "one of the most perverted souls of our time." Musset nicknamed him "Mme. Pernelle" and "Sainte-Bévue" (*bévue* meaning blunder).

"A round little man, short and provincial in appearance, a profile somewhat like Béranger's, a high forehead, a shin-



ing bald head, large eyes, the nose of an inquisitive, sensual man, a large mouth not beautifully formed but given to pleasant smiling, ruddy and puffy cheeks"—such was the picture the Goncourts had of Sainte-Beuve, whom one might mistake, they thought, for a provincial librarian living under the cloistered shadow of books above a cellar well-stocked with rich red wine; talking, chattering vivaciously about little things, or little aspects of things, giving no broad generalizations or vivid impressions. "His conversation is like the palette of a lady who paints water-colours, charged with pretty, pale, soft tones." They saw him in 1862, living in a "solemnly cold bourgeois room" in the rue Montparnasse, like a Benedictine monk in a hotel. He was "fuming and foamingly sputtering about *Salammbô*, which he called unreadable and pertaining to tragedy of an essentially classic nature, but with so much of battle, pestilence and famine. . . . While we attempted to defend the author of such a book, Sainte-Beuve continued to spit and vomit his opinions, the victim of a childish rage which had its comic side." A year later, not, of course, in any reference to the above interview, Sainte-Beuve told the Goncourts he had often wished that he had the courage to kill himself, and that suicide seemed to him an admirable remedy for life's ills.

Yet, with all his faults, Sainte-Beuve had genius; he had a charm in his happier moments, and his conversation, his vast but not pedantic conversational use of great learning, are the distinguishing features of the portraits which his contemporaries have, for the most part, left of him. His nerves had the better of his disposition, and this curse was

visited upon his friends in a manner which he was powerless to prevent. His greatness was certainly not that of a poet, and perhaps not so much that of the critic, *par excellence*, as that of the historian. Still more surely his greatness was not inherent in his character as a man.

## CHAPTER XVII

### *The Magny Dinners*

THERE is no place more conducive to conversation than a French restaurant. It is very difficult to eat good food and drink good wine without talking, and as a Frenchman has said: "Without wine there is no friendship."

In the case of the Magny Dinners it happened that, with wine, there was often strife. Conversational strife is, however, the best of wars, and if there must be war, it can easily be admitted that heated argument is the least objectionable variety. Who would be, so to speak, a conversational pacifist?

The Magny Dinners were instituted as a mild diversion for Gavarni, who was ill. They rapidly grew into desperate literary encounters—which had not been the purpose of Dr. Veyne, a good-natured and especially generous benefactor of members of artistic circles who needed help. A weekly dinner is an unusual prescription, but when Dr. Veyne told Sainte-Beuve his plan, the critic hailed the idea as one he himself had long cherished, and what was meant as a tonic for Gavarni was welcomed as an entertainment by the other members who, beside the doctor, his patient and Sainte-Beuve, were the Goncourts, Chennevières, and soon afterward, Gautier, Turgenev, Renan, Taine, Sherer, Flaubert, Saint-Victor and Viollet-le-Duc. Once or twice George Sand was to be seen sitting "timidly at the table and whispering to Flaubert: 'You are the only one here who does not get

on my nerves.' ” The first Magny Dinner was held on Saturday, November 22, 1862, and thereafter the members met on Mondays, which happened to be the evenings most convenient for Sainte-Beuve. The choice of the Magny restaurant also arose from the fact that Sainte-Beuve suggested it.

The origin of the famous Magny restaurant is described in Banville's *L'Ame de Paris*. It was an unpretentious little place at the juncture of the rue Dauphine, the rue Saint-André-des-Arts and the rue Contrescarpe, now called the rue Mazet, and not far from the Boulevard Saint-Germain. Neither the Magny restaurant nor the neighbouring “Auberge du Cheval Blanc” now exists. Magny was the excellent proprietor, the excellent host, and Banville describes his face as “intelligent et spirituel.” He would talk to his patrons, give each table his special attention, and was usually asked to sit down and have a drink. He was famous for his wines as well as for his cooking, and he liked to tell his story, his having begun his life in restaurants as a dishwasher in the famous establishment, rue Montorgueil, of Philippe, where he watched and learned the Parisian mysteries of the culinary art. He made a name for himself, in his own kitchen, by inventing “Chateaubriand,” a name which he asserted had nothing to do with the great author, and he cooked the best “écrevisses à la Bordelaise” to be had in Paris.

The chief authority for the discussions at these dinners is the so consistently indispensable *Journal des Goncourts*, and though it has been said to over-emphasize the violence of the contestants, and to be disloyal to the friends of the authors in these revelations, and in various imputations of

malicious motives and petty sensitiveness, yet the accounts are spirited and interesting, and if many of the arguments were less heated than most of those related by the Goncourts, there must have been more than an ordinary amount of violent expression of opinion. "Except for the interference of certain persons," they said, "the Magny dinners stood for one of the last strongholds of the freedom of thought and speech." Some of the topics of conversation were mild enough in the hands of such excitable persons. "What did God do before he created the world, and what has he done since?"

The testimony of the Goncourts was criticized by Renan and Taine. We find in the letters of the latter: "The indiscretions that concern me are not offensive; once or twice I am made to say what I have never thought, but this is done with no evil intent. But the authors, for want of sufficient culture, have not always understood what was said in their presence. I beg you to believe that if the Magny dinners had been such as they are here represented, I should not have attended them more than three times. . . . The conversations were worth listening to. Unfortunately the topics were above the heads of the two stenographers [the Goncourts]. Every private opinion expressed in their presence is liable to appear in print. In this respect, I consider that they have behaved badly toward Sainte-Beuve, who was exceptionally kind to them, and gave them their introduction into literary circles. Sainte-Beuve, in founding the dinners, bound them to literary discretion."

It is not true that the Goncourts owed their presence at the dinners entirely to Sainte-Beuve, however "kind" to



them, in a variety of ways, he may have been. Taine brings two very different charges against the Goncourts. It would appear that they misrepresented Taine's remarks and, on the other hand, that they quoted Sainte-Beuve too accurately or too freely for his comfort. Was it humanly or humanely possible to preserve or create comfort for Sainte-Beuve? One could neither quote nor ignore him without hurting his feelings.

Clapperclawing criticism and attendant sufferings were frequent before the inauguration of the Magny Dinners. In 1860 the Goncourts had occasion to remark: "Conversation occupied itself with the various friends of our acquaintance, with the difficulty of finding congenial persons with whom one may agreeably live and who have good manners, are not bourgeois nor of ill-repute nor otherwise insufferable. The faults of Saint-Victor were regretted. What a pleasant companion he would be if he could only let himself go, and if he were not subject to sudden moods of coldness, of reserve, of stiffness even toward friends of three years standing, of confidential intimacy!" At Aubryet's, August 24, 1860—"Flaubert and Saint-Victor argue about Voltaire, and voices become shrill and harsh. 'I regard Voltaire as a saint,' roars Flaubert, exasperated. 'Voltaire does not move me,' put in Gautier, 'I find him priest-like in spite of himself; he is the Prud'homme of deism.' Almost everyone becomes more and more excited. Gautier alone remains calm."

It is well to follow here and there the Goncourts' chronological arrangement, and to select the most interesting moments from the long hours of the Magny Dinners, week by week.

January 31, 1863: "Sainte-Beuve is joyously enthusiastic over a family party of the night before. Vernon had invited him, his housekeeper and his servants to dinner and the opera—a party of people à la Paul de Kock. He beamingly enlarges upon the simple joys of the evening, and says that he now has a more comforting philosophy of life than he had in his youth"—that word at once plunges him into sad memories, and he tells of his poor health, his poor appetite, his romanticism, his remorse for having been unkind to a former mistress: and the pleasure of the immediate past is forgotten in the pain of the more distant."

February 14, 1863: "'My work,' said Sainte-Beuve, 'has always prevented me from spending an entire night with a woman.'" The Goncourts on this occasion further describe Sainte-Beuve being incapable of impartial judgments. "He has never clearly perceived the insanity of a Pasquier, the defects of a Thiers, the profound emptiness of a Guizot. He was always too much influenced by political importance or sentimental considerations. When someone called Mirabeau a traitor, Sainte-Beuve said: 'But how deeply Mirabeau loved Sophie!' Nevertheless, Sainte-Beuve could be charming; full of amusing anecdotes. It was remarked that Alfred de Vigny's speech at the Academy was too long. 'Really,' said he, 'how can that be true? I am not at all tired.'" Suddenly Sainte-Beuve attacks Hugo. "He jumps as if bitten under the table by a beast, and calls Hugo a charlatan, and the first of speculators in literature. Suddenly again Sainte-Beuve remembers that it was Hugo who taught him to write poetry, and his tone softens; he admits that Hugo has great qualities."

March 11, 1863:

"SAINTE-BEUVE: 'Balzac has genius, if you insist, but he is a monster. His writings are not *true!*'"

GAUTIER: 'But we are all monsters. Who has given us pictures of this period if not Balzac? George Sand?'

RENAN: 'God! I find more truth in George Sand than in Balzac. She is the greatest artist of our time.'

GAUTIER: 'Impossible!'

RENAN: 'Three hundred years hence the novels of George Sand will be read.'

GAUTIER: 'At Chaillot, perhaps. [Chaillot is an insane asylum]. Mme. Sand has no greater lasting power than Mme. de Genlis.' [Mme. de Genlis was an inconsequential novelist of the eighteenth century.]

March 14, 1863: "Sainte-Beuve tells Taine he would like to be an Englishman; that would be to be somebody; to be a Frenchman was nothing."

June 22nd, 1863:

"GAUTIER: 'Prostitution is the normal condition of women.'

SOMEONE: 'Long live sterile mistresses!'

At this point Sainte-Beuve, feeling gay, makes ear-rings for himself of bunches of cherries."

January 15, 1866:

"TAINE: 'All talented men are the products of their environment.'

THE GONCOURTS: 'What is the root of the exoticism of Chateaubriand? It is a banana grown in a barrack.'

GAUTIER: 'The brain of an artist is the same now as it was in the time of the Pharaohs. Perhaps the brains of bourgeois have been modified by the passage of the years, but, if so, it is of no consequence.'

Taine speaks of his hard life of work which has deprived him of love, and Gautier replies that there is no need for this renunciation; that sexual intercourse does not deprive one of aspirations and ideals but, on the contrary, increases them."

The most charming of the group, the kindest, broadest, most serene and lovable of the Magny members seems unquestionably to have been Turgenev. Everyone testified, even the Goncourts, to the graciousness and warm-heartedness of the Russian giant, "the good Muscovite," as Flaubert affectionately called him. "Turgenev loves me too much, perhaps, to judge me impartially," said Flaubert, and in this opinion Henry James, who knew them both, agreed. Turgenev, like Flaubert and Gautier, could be clownish at times, and Henry James, in an essay on the Russian novelist, tells of seeing the great man at Mme. Viardot's in Paris, going about on all-fours, dressed in shawls and a mask, and generally ready to do anything in his power for the amusement of the company. The Goncourts, early in their *Journal*, describe Turgenev as "a charming giant having the appearance of the good genius of a forest, the benevolent mythological inhabitant of a mountain. He is of great physical beauty, his eyes are as blue as the sky; and the charm of his Russian accent, the musical quality of his voice has something of youthful freshness altogether delightful." Later, Edmond de Goncourt

claims that Turgenev had "a hostile, an unjust, attitude toward Daudet and me as writers. . . . Turgenev was a miniature painter of humanity. He lacked strength and breadth of observation, and his work falls short of the primitive ruggedness of Russia." This is to take subtlety for superficiality, calmness for coldness; and though Turgenev is not, perhaps, so typically Russian in his characteristic method as Tolstoi and Dostoievsky, his penetration is deep, his touch is sure; and if Dostoievsky represents certain phases of Russian peculiarity more vividly, it is not impossible that Turgenev may have understood them as well or even better. His quiet study, his warm sympathy, his broad tolerance and pity for the sufferings of the Russian peasant are of an unmistakable order of greatness. And where in the novels of Tolstoi and Dostoievsky are there more beautiful, more exquisite pictures of the Russian landscape than in Turgenev's works?

It has been shown that Gautier disagreed with Taine in theory. So did Turgenev. At one of the dinners he said: "The comparison is scarcely a noble one, but let me compare Taine to a hunting-dog I once owned. He was excellent in every way; he was a marvellous hunter in all respects but one. He could not follow the scent. I was obliged to sell him."

There was frequent talk of symptoms, sicknesses, hallucinations and other phenomena at the Magny restaurant. "During the operation," said Turgenev (he had had a cyst removed from his stomach), "I thought of our dinners, and I tried to find words to describe the feeling of the steel in my flesh—like a knife cutting a banana."

October 22, 1866: The conversation about medical sub-



jects jumps to the population of planets, and thence to God. "There is a rain of remarks in attempts to define God." The Goncourts' conception is like a painting by Michelangelo; Taine, in Hegelian fashion, thinks of God as a vast universe in which worlds are atoms. Renan, after much thought, and to the amusement of everyone—in which he joins—compares God to an oyster. Now the conversation shifts to Homer, and there is a hot argument between the Goncourts and Saint-Victor as to the relative merits of Homer and Hugo. The Goncourts prefer Hugo, and, at this blasphemy, Saint-Victor waxes positively furious, and begins to shout with his metallic voice, to make the wildest gestures, and finally says that the Goncourts have insulted the religion of all intelligent persons. Edmond says it is strange he cannot be allowed to express his opinion of Homer in the midst of friends who have met for frank discussion. Saint-Victor continues his violent outbursts, and Edmond, whose nerves have been put on edge by the noises of Saint-Victor, begins to make as much noise himself. Sainte-Beuve tries to calm them, and at last they are calm. As he takes his departure, Saint-Victor offers to shake Edmond's hand, and Edmond wishes he had not done so. Edmond would have preferred to end his friendship for Saint-Victor.

Sainte-Beuve is furious at Flaubert for having defended Michelet as an historian; he pounds the table with his fists and, almost choking with excitement and speaking with great difficulty, manages somehow to deliver himself of the opinion that the hysterical nature of Michelet's writings is the result of the fact that Michelet had known and violently desired only one woman. "With a beating heart, a

parched tongue and throat, it came over me," says Edmond, after listening to one of these extravagant controversies, "that all political discussions reduce themselves finally to the remark: 'I am better than you'; and that all literary discussions may be thus summed up: 'I have better taste than you.' "

We know what Gautier thought of the seventeenth century, but the following conversation with Flaubert is significant:

GAUTIER: "My verses are golden horsemen galloping on a brazen bridge."

FLAUBERT: "What do you think of Molière?"

GAUTIER: "As an upholsterer he had a certain merit, but as a poet he is a contemptible fellow whom we would have hissed had he lived in 1830."

FLAUBERT: "I think you are too severe. He has written some charming things."

GAUTIER: "Spare me all consideration of such a man; he should have been hung for his cacophonies. Oh, Flaubert! How can a man of your reputation fail to vomit in disgust at this:

*Et par un doux hymen couronner en Valère  
La flamme d'un amant genereux et sincère.*

Do you think one can crown a flame? Beware! A heresy of this sort may do you much harm."

FLAUBERT (after agreeing that Molière was not faultless): "There is an admirable phrase in *Le Malade Imaginaire*, a phrase which only a writer of genius could have formed: '*Ce sont des Égyptiens vêtus en Maures qui font*

*des danses mêlées de chansons.*' That phrase is a diamond."

Having thus championed Molière, it is soon Flaubert's voice that is raised in defence of Racine, who had been jeeringly quoted as author of the line:

*De ton horrible aspect purge tous mes états.*

To *purge* a State of an *appearance*! The Goncourts say they must spare their readers the ridiculous and unprintable comparisons and witticisms inspired by these words. "And yet," said Flaubert, "it is Racine who wrote the most beautiful line in all French literature, a phrase of eternal and sublime beauty:

*"La fille de Minos et de Pasiphaé."*

Apropos of Delavigne's *Les Messéniennes*, a play about which Sainte-Beuve was extravagantly enthusiastic, and which Flaubert praised, Gautier turned pale, put his hand on a knife, and said: "Flaubert, you have narrowly escaped death!"

In the years from 1874 to 1877, the Magny Dinners faded and declined. Edmond de Goncourt had survived Sainte-Beuve, Gautier, Jules de Goncourt; and the places of the departed had regrettably been taken by the wrong people; there were ministers, politicians, dreadful bores, and the Magny Dinners were dead. "I feel like a conquered man, a gloomy survivor of a France which is no more," said Edmond.

The Magny quarrels must not be taken too seriously;

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they were, at times, so taken by the Goncourt who was to mourn their loss. It is interesting and characteristic, the way great men talk on intimate terms. One seems to know them better, but one is in danger of misjudging them. A witty, an extravagant remark is seldom literally true or meant to be. A literal interpretation is usually wrong. The Magny Dinners were delightful; much more so, on the whole, than if their members had always been moderate, serious, fair, discreet. To have called Racine a pig, and to have addressed a fellow-writer by many names as bad if not worse, is not in itself a brilliant achievement. The Magny Dinners as revealed in the memoirs of the time do not always display the wit, the finesse, the polish of eighteenth-century discussions of literature. The ideas expressed were frequently crude, the arguments often far-fetched and question-begging, and the lack of good-nature and of consideration for each other of the members of these evening gatherings was often much to be deplored. Yet, the charm and fascination of conversation at a very free if not always a very kindly level of interest and feeling is proved by the fact that there were so many dinners, and by the moments when love of literature was a bond of deep and pleasurable sympathy.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### *Gautier and the Last Years of the Second Empire*

FOR Gautier as for all French writers of note, the question of the Académie Française was a point of debate. As early as 1846 Baudelaire wrote: "This year M. Gautier has praised everybody. Can it be, by chance, that the hour of Academic recognition—solemn and soporific—can have sounded for him, that he has become so good-natured?" There was nothing new in Gautier's critical generosity, but he and Baudelaire would have liked to belong to the Academy and they looked to Sainte-Beuve to help them. The "Revue Hebdomadaire," September 27, 1924, states that Baudelaire asked Sainte-Beuve to write an article on his *Paradis Artificiels* at the time of its appearance. Sainte-Beuve promised to do so, but either forgot to or changed his mind when the work was first published. However, when Baudelaire's name came up for election, Sainte-Beuve did put his hand to a paper which thoroughly supported Baudelaire's candidacy by means of the "Constitutional." There was, perhaps, a certain calculation on Baudelaire's part in praising Sainte-Beuve as he sometimes did, for there were so many personal and theoretical points on which they fundamentally differed; yet each, to a certain extent at least, seems honestly to have admired the work of the other. The influence of Sainte-Beuve was insufficient, at any



rate, to obtain Baudelaire's election to the Academy.

It was so in the case of Gautier. An article in the "Mercure de France," October 16, 1917, asserts that Sainte-Beuve became a Senator largely through the instrumentality of the Princess Mathilde, and that he had been introduced to her by Gautier. In exchange for this favour, Sainte-Beuve had promised to do what he could to get Gautier into the Academy, and it seems that when Baudelaire first asked Sainte-Beuve's assistance with the same object in view, Sainte-Beuve had replied that he must first fulfil his obligation to "Baudelaire's master, Gautier."

So many French writers, whether in or out of the Academy, make fun of it; and who can fail to observe the injustice of Mérimée's having been a member and not Balzac or Flaubert! There was never any effort on the part of Anatole France to hide his criticism for an institution which had "crowned" what he regarded as one of the least admirable of his works, *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard*. "The Academy elects anyone who is not a literary artist, or a lawyer or a prince," observed Gautier to Feydeau, "but nevertheless I confess that it would have given me great pleasure to be one of the 'Forty.' After all, it is painful to a man of letters not to have been admitted, though I know the weakness of my attitude when I remember that Balzac was not a member, and that George Sand and the great Dumas never will be." . . . "One is born to be an academician as one is born to be a cook, a bishop, or a policeman." "There is a mystery concerning me. Why is it that I always fail where others succeed? I have no enemies, I have friends, I am supposed to have talent. At least I have as much as Mérimée, haven't I?"

In 1863, Sainte-Beuve told the Goncourts that Gautier had no chance of being elected; that he did not know the members; that it would require a year of calls, introductions, and that an election was an intrigue—"in the best sense of the word"—an intrigue that Gautier did not understand. Yet Gautier had powerful support. A few years later Mérimée made the trip from Cannes to Paris expressly to vote for him; Napoleon III and the Princess Mathilde did what they could. Sainte-Beuve's last visit to the Academy—April 29, 1869—was made in Gautier's behalf, and the defeat of his candidate was a deep wound to Sainte-Beuve in the last years of his life. According to Feydeau, the Academy was on the point of electing Gautier the year of his death; and thus it would appear that though "born to be elected," he died to be rejected.

The last years of Gautier's life were troubled by matters more vital than the arbitrariness of academic opinion. Chief of all ailments was encroaching age, and as early as 1857 the Goncourts describe him as showing signs of fatigue, of general decline of vigour, his face heavily lined, his cheeks sagging. In 1862 Gautier would have agreed with Baudelaire that "the Paris of to-day is not the Paris of 1840. It is a hubbub of voices of imbeciles and useless creatures very indelicate in their way of killing time, and utterly indifferent or averse to the true pleasures of literature." And there were constant financial difficulties. After the revolution of 1870, Gautier said to the Goncourts: "This last upheaval is really my death-blow. I have always been the victim of revolutions. The Revolution of February (1848) swept away what money I had been able to make after the Revolution of July (1830) had impover-

ished me. I had nearly entered the Academy, with the Emperor's help, when along came the Republic. My work must henceforth be characterized by hypocrisy, and my descriptions must be *tricoloured*." It seems that Napoleon III had intended to give six 600-franc pensions to six poets including Gautier, but he had too many other things to think about, and the Princess Mathilde felt obliged to come to Gautier's rescue. It is also asserted by Du Camp that Gautier told him in 1870 that he did not wish to die, but wished he were dead; illness was settling upon him, and in addition to fatty degeneration of the heart, he was to suffer from partial paralysis, consumption of the kidneys, and loss of memory.

In *Tableaux de Siège*, Gautier described his impressions of the famine in Paris during the war, the deserted streets, the theatres turned into hospitals, the courage of the Parisians in the Prussian bombardment (so like the same fortitude of 1918), and especially the miseries of animals, the apparent suspicion on the part of household pets that men had suddenly become their enemies. When cats and dogs gave out, the people tried to catch birds, and the wild animals in cages were pitiable subject to starvation as well as imprisonment. "Théophile Gautier has a horse," wrote Victor Hugo, "and this horse was requisitioned; it was wanted for food. Gautier wrote begging me to save the creature. I asked the minister to grant his request. I saved the horse." Apropos of the last years of Gautier's long friendship for Hugo, M. Bergeret says that at a banquet (not during the siege of Paris) given for Hugo, the guest of honour met his old friend of the days of 1830 for the last time. They talked of poetry to their great de-

light; they talked of their youthful days, and Hugo proposed that Gautier go with him to Guernsey, and that they should live together there for the rest of their lives. "We will walk in the sun by the sea, and we will write verses richly rhymed." This would have been a delightful way for two veteran Romanticists to end romantic careers, but Guernsey, said Gautier, was too far from Paris, and Hugo could not persuade him to go.

At Guernsey Gautier would have written no verses to compare with those of his old friend, but he might have been more comfortable than the elder Goncourt described him as being, in February, 1871, on a fifth floor, in a miserable room in the rue de Beaune. "The attic in which I found him, with his two old sisters in dismal old clothes, was filled with the smoke of his cigar. There was an iron bed, a worn armchair and other meagre furnishings and boarders including the most famished-looking cats. Théo wore a red cap, an old velvet waistcoat with which he had formerly adorned himself at the Princess Mathilde's, and which had acquired so many greasy spots that it might have belonged to a Neapolitan cook. And there sat the sick master of the art of writing and of conversation, looking like a Doge in distress, like a poor and melancholy Marino Faliero, acted at the Théâtre Saint-Michel. While he talked as Rabelais must have talked, I thought of the inadequacy of compensation for a life devoted to art; and, by comparison with the fate of Gautier, of the seventy-thousand francs-per-year of one Ponson de Terrail whose sumptuous and tasteless belongings I had seen removed from his house that morning, after his death." Banville also describes Gautier in the rue de Beaune, sick, uncomfortable,



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unable to work, reading again and again the *Légende des Siècles* of Hugo, of which he never tired.

It was bad enough to suffer, but to be a hideous old creature—that was the summit of misfortune, and Gautier looked at his face in a mirror, watching the gradual change from bad to worse. He managed, said Bergeret, to do a little writing in bed when the doctor would not let him get up, and in this way he laboured at his *Histoire du Romantisme* until the medical ultimatum was an interdict of all effort of any kind. But as soon as he was ordered to stay in bed, Gautier refused to go to bed at all, and spent his days and nights in his chair, or wandering about the house (he had returned to Neuilly) and further endangering his life by absolutely declining either to stop smoking or to smoke less. "There descended on him," wrote Edmond de Goncourt, "the sad humility, the pathetic helplessness peculiar to second childhood, and it seemed as if remarks made to him reached him as if coming from a great distance." In August, 1872, he had a paralysis of the tongue that lasted three hours, and his weakness continued to increase each day. "I saw Gautier the day before his death," wrote Banville, "and he seemed to me exactly like a god. His garments were draped like those of a statue, and his thick hair and the expression of his face were like a representation of Zeus. He spoke of art serenely, fluently and as if in perfect faith that the future of French literature would be worthy of its past, especially if Hugo's influence continued to exert itself."

Gautier died October 23, 1872. Edmond de Goncourt wrote next day in the *Journal*: "There was nothing in his appearance of the death of a man of our time. His face

had the strange grim serenity of a barbarian asleep in nothingness, and there was something in his expression that reminded me, I do not know why, of the figures carved at the portals of the Cathedral of Chartres, and, somehow, of old Merovingian stories. The room, the old bed of oak wood, the red velvet-covered prayer-book, the spray of box in an old vase, the whole effect of the place suddenly gave me the feeling of being in a cubiculum of ancient Gaul, or in some grandiose, primitive, rather formidable old dwelling-place; and the illusion was strengthened by the presence of the disheveled, ashen-grey-haired sister whose grief was like that of a Guanamara."

Having been an officer of the Légion d'Honneur, Gautier's funeral procession was led by a captain at the head of a detachment of chasseurs. Singers from the Opéra sang in the church, and Gautier was buried in the cemetery of Montmartre.

"Poor Théo!" wrote George Sand to Flaubert; "I profoundly pity him, not because he is dead, but because he died twenty years ago." And Flaubert replied: "He is the last of my intimate friends; all the others are dead. Whom shall I see now when I go to Paris? With whom shall I be able to talk about the things that interest me? I know people who are supposed to be thinkers, but where shall I find an artist? I tell you, Gautier died of 'modern carrionism'—that was what he called it, and he recently used the expression several times in talking to me."

The influence of Gautier's theories and of his work, though never a powerful force, is nevertheless definitely traceable in the school of Leconte de Lisle. Though Gautier and Baudelaire admired each other as poets, their work

pointed the way to absolutely different aims and developments. The poetry of Gautier suggested or led to the "Parnasse," the group of poets whose master was Leconte de Lisle. The poetry of Baudelaire was the source of at least a part of the inspiration of Mallarmé and the Symbolists.

"The only poet to whom Leconte de Lisle may be compared without absurdity is Gautier," said Baudelaire, "but in Gautier's verses the details are more advantageously set off and his colour-effects are more striking. Leconte de Lisle is specially devoted to a philosophical background. Both poets love the East, the vast expanse of deserts, and they feel that repose is a principle of beauty. There is a passionate luminousness in their productions." In Leconte de Lisle's notes there is the following reference to Gautier: "He was an excellent poet, an excellent writer, and he has been very unjustly neglected." Gautier had no school of followers whom he held "with the Olympian, masterly power, the constant menace of a terrible irony," as Leconte de Lisle dominated his pupils, according to Xavier de Ricard. As a teacher and doctrinaire his theories were in accord with Gautier's, and he says in a preface to his poems: "Personal feelings and emotions count for little here." However, we may question this. At any rate, the poetry of Leconte de Lisle is full of emotion compared to Gautier's, and the fact that the leaders of the "Parnasse" suppressed a flood of feeling does not prevent passion from making itself apparent beneath the serenity of the surface.

"Charming and terrible, gay and sarcastic, tender and haughty, Leconte de Lisle created for me the impression of charm," says Henri de Regnier. "His high graciousness,

his wit, his simplicity, his goodness, are as reasonable as the smile which sometimes illuminated his blue eyes, and caused his monocle to fall; his sinuous lips could tighten over an epigram. I saw him for the first time when I was twenty years old [1884] and his appearance moved me greatly; I admired and respected the old man who advanced with deliberate and weary steps, whose long white hair hung down from under his hat. His broad face was distinguished by noble and regular features. Slowly and majestically he passed by. I should have liked to follow him, but the sharp severity of his clear blue eyes held me in check, and I remained where I was with a beating heart, while Leconte de Lisle continued his Olympian advance in a golden light which seemed to me to enfold him as in a divine radiance."

It would be too much to claim for Gautier that he was the literary source of Leconte de Lisle, yet he was undoubtedly the direct precursor of the great poet, and his work is so similar in certain ways that it must at least have exerted the power of suggestion. The relation, on the other hand, of Baudelaire to the Symbolists is much more definite, and though we cannot see the results of Gautier's work in later productions than those of the "Parnasse," there is, at least, a touch of Baudelaire in many of the writers of the present day. The "infernal" in literature is, of course, not new. It was, however, altogether different in Dante, for example, and it has become totally transformed and specially a fantastic and "difficult" aspect in the imagination in modern times. It may be markedly noted in James Joyce, on a scale so vast and terrible that in Baudelaire, by comparison, it seems merely a few short steps taken into the depths of a jungle of horrors.



"Symbolism," says Symons, "is the revolt against exteriority, against rhetoric, against a materialistic tradition. . . . The ideal to Villiers de l'Isle-Adam being the real, spiritual beauty and material beauty its reflection or revelation, it is with a sort of fury that he attacks the materializing forces of the world. . . . Mallarmé's doctrine was divined by Gérard de Nerval, but what in Gérard was pure vision becomes in Mallarmé a logical sequence of meditation." And we may bring out Baudelaire in his relation to Mallarmé by again referring to Baudelaire's admission of his extreme sensitiveness to perfumes on the crest of which he could float as others do in a musical ecstasy. "I make music," said Mallarmé, "and that explains my poetry." There is an unearthliness, a mystery, a haunted and ominous quality in the prose of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam and in Mallarmé's poetry, and these characteristics are directly traceable to the *Fleurs du Mal*, whether as *Fleurs du Bon*, or otherwise, for the power of evil is one of the key-notes to Baudelaire's poems, and there are of course infinite variations on that and other notes to be found in the work of his successors, the mystery of that power or of other supernatural forces being endless for the imaginative processes. One finds a strange mixture of realism and mysticism, and a striking absence of Romanticism (whether of the Hugo or of the Gautier variety) and of the naturalistic influences of the intermediate period.

It is the opinion of Anatole France that Flaubert's ideas were at least similar to, and to some extent derived from, those of Gautier and Baudelaire; and there are many quotations to be found in corroboration of the force of Gautier's theories and of the significance of his literary ac-

tivity. "Gautier marks the transition period between the school of 1830 and that of 1860," says Henriot. "When Musset had died and Vigny had retired and Lamartine had lost himself in politics, and Hugo had been exiled, Gautier was still in Paris, and young writers grouped themselves about him." Even Brunetière, who had no faith in Gautier's lasting qualities, said that the literary progress from Romanticism to Naturalism cannot be understood without a study of Gautier's works. The *Émaux et Camées* appeared in 1852, and Leconte de Lisle's *Poèmes Antiques* in 1853, and "these were death-blows to the preceding sentimental Romanticism," says Remy de Gourmont. "You write verses which are curved like heraldic lambrequins," said Gautier to Leconte de Lisle's pupil, José Maria de Heredia, who admired the "elegant exactitude and scrupulous precision, the fine restraint" (Ibrovac) of Gautier's poetry. In Huneker's mind, *Une Nuit de Cléopâtre* "rivals *Salammô* in exotic colouring and architectural splendour," and *La Morte Amoureuse* seems to George Saintsbury "one of the very few expressions in French prose of really passionate love." Henry James regards *Le Capitaine Fracasse* as "the model of picturesque romances ranking with the first works of imagination produced in our day."

The insufficiency of the French language for certain purposes was felt by Gautier in a passage from *Une Nuit de Cléopâtre*: "We have to describe a magnificent orgy, a celebration which would make that of Balthazar seem a pale and mild affair, in short, a night in Cleopatra's life. How shall we be able to use the chaste, the cold, the demure French language for this purpose? How shall we

picture the great, frenzied debauch, the mingling of wine and blood, the wild rush of an insatiable desire?" Gautier himself was neither chaste, cold nor demure, yet it was he and not the French language which could only, at its best, do a definite limited thing, and this he confessed or asserted unconsciously or otherwise, in a passage in *Caprices et Zigzags*. "Although we have never brought cool water to a thirsty old woman, we are in the position of the young girl in Perrault's story. We cannot open our mouth without letting fall a shower of pieces of gold, of diamonds, of rubies and of pearls. We should like, at times, to be able to vomit a toad, an octopus, a red mouse, if only for variety, but it is not in our power to do so." It is variety that Gautier lacks, and it is also depth and a profound knowledge of character. His pearls and diamonds are sometimes deficient in lustre, and one suspects them, now and then, of being imitations. His effects are often dangerously near the mark of mere prettiness, yet his exquisite art, the lightness and dexterity of his touch, the delicate proportions of his forms are almost always charming and satisfying in their own sense and for their rare perfection.

The self-analysis, the self-torture, the restlessness of the modern world began with Rousseau, and we find it to-day, no matter with what modifications, in the great novel of Marcel Proust. The classicism of Gautier, of Leconte de Lisle, is an island in the stream of development, or rather a fragment of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century formalism (much as Gautier and Leconte de Lisle might resent the charge) washed down in the torrent and left along the bank somewhere in a quiet pool or back-water. The river has changed it, altered some of its character, but there it

remains and floats with no sign or need of immediate decay.

The great writers of the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century are divisible into two main groups—those whose interests and efforts were predominantly concerned with questions of style and form and of artistic representation, and those whose first care was that of verisimilitude, of putting rich, broad life itself colourfully upon the printed page, letting form and style take care of themselves, or at least assume a second-rate importance to that of the bigger task as they saw it, the special characteristic of their personalities and points of view. In the first of these groups the leading names are Gautier, Merimée, Baudelaire, the Goncourts, Flaubert and Leconte de Lisle. In the second are Hugo, Balzac, Dumas and George Sand. The classification is meant to be suggestive, not absolute, and it is interesting to see what a variety and richness of productivity resulted in both classes of cases. For the most part it is an example of what can be done outside the field of seventeenth-century classicism; and who can doubt that the literary revolution at the beginning of the eighteenth century was more profitable in its attainment of aims than the political revolution at the end of the preceding century? It had been supposed to be necessary for the general good to cut off royal heads. Some of Gautier's expressions may lead one to suppose that he might have loved to see the axe falling upon the neck of Racine and of Molière. But he could not and he would not if he could. That is the advantage of literary revolutions. They are, after all, quite harmless. They are in the main constructively evolutionary rather than destructively revolutionary, for, in

the history of literature, there is always something gained in the sense that there is always something original in the best examples of the new expression, in spite of the fact that that newness is seldom completely original, always derived to a certain extent, always with roots or similar growths in preceding literary ventures. Just as in biological heredity, so in literary re-birth or descent, there is often the skipping of a generation, the inheritance of a trait of indirect or not immediate chronological precedence. Literary criticism is far too frequently of the destructively revolutionary sort and it is never a good argument to attempt to damn a past product on the basis of its not being similar to a recent effort; and the reverse attack is equally to be discouraged. Criticism should grow with the growth of art, and its most helpful function is to demonstrate or help to show the really fruitful innovations, to distinguish the original from the derived. This is not only the truest but the most interesting and stimulating activity of criticism. The law of art, like the law of life, is that of progress, of diversity, of rich breadth and scope.

*The End*





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